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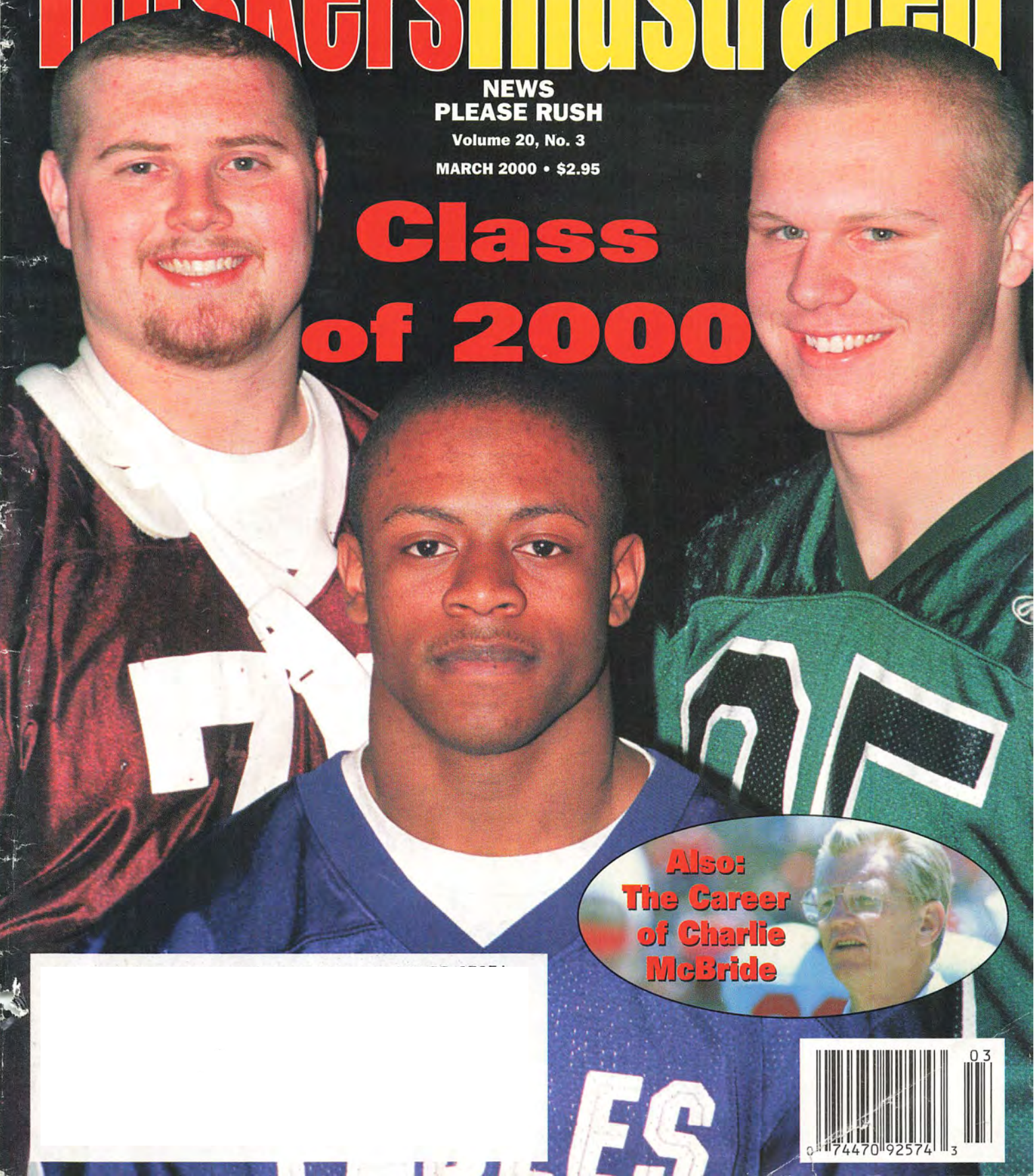
Huskers Illustrated

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Volume 20, No. 3

MARCH 2000 • \$2.95

Class of 2000



**Also:
The Career
of Charlie
McBride**



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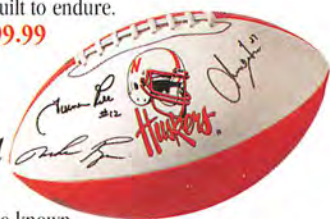
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Huskers Illustrated CONTENTS

MARCH 2000 • Volume 20, No. 3



12 Signing Day Report

Nebraska Coach Frank Solich would have liked to sign a quarterback, but he's still pleased with his latest class of 21 recruits. *By Mike Babcock*

16 Recruit Capsules

A closer look at the members of the Class of 2000.

28 The Recruiting Trail

Nebraska's summer camps once again paid big dividends in the recruiting process. *By James Hale*

32 Big 12 Report

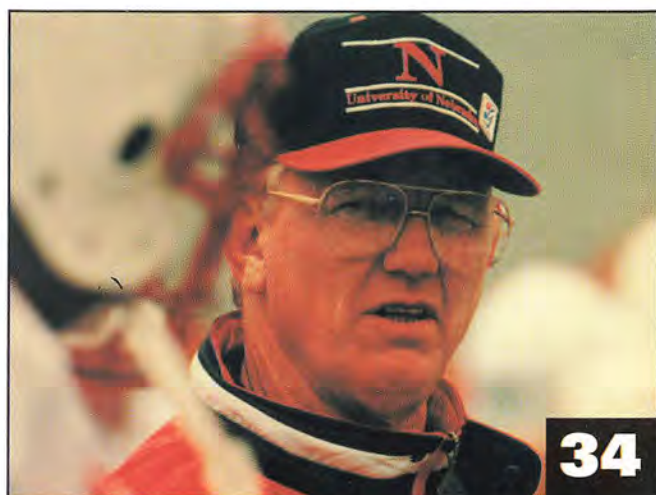
It was a banner year, as conference schools pulled in some of the country's top players. *By James Hale*

ON THE COVER

The newest recruiting class includes Nebraskans Mike Erickson (left) of Papillion-LaVista, Lornell McPherson of Omaha Central and Chris Septak of Millard West. *Photo by Scott Bruhn*

DEPARTMENTS

Letters	5
NU Notebook	6
<i>Former Husker Jeff Jamrog has returned home as the new defensive line coach.</i>	
Letter From The Editor	8
State Of The Huskers	9
<i>Quarterback Eric Crouch doesn't like the idea of wearing a green jersey in practice.</i>	
From The West	10
<i>Nebraska's execution makes it look as though the system is far less complicated than it really is.</i>	
From The Beat	11
<i>The Nebraska baseball team hopes to prove that last season was no fluke.</i>	
Men's Hoops	44
<i>Communication is the key for talented junior college transfer Kimani Ffriend.</i>	
Women's Hoops	48
<i>Senior forward Charlie Rogers survived early doubts to find success as a Husker.</i>	
All Sports	50
<i>Nebraska swimmer Sasha Pine battles nerves when her husband Adam competes.</i>	
Crossword Puzzle	52
Q&A	53
<i>Six-time All-American gymnast Heather Brink discusses her career at Nebraska.</i>	
Final Word	54



34 Goodbye Charlie

Charlie McBride's retirement was difficult for some of his players to accept. *By Mike Babcock*

NEXT ISSUE

The April issue will be mailed about March 21.

Wondering 'What If?'

Dear Mr. (Adrian) Mayes and Mr. (Carlyle) Holiday:

I am certain that one of your reasons for not signing with the Big Red was that you wanted to spend more time with your family. You will be granted your wish as you will certainly be home early for the holidays at bowl time, as LSU and Notre Dame may very well not qualify for a bowl.

I hope you enjoy wondering "what if" while you are home with your families in Texas over the holidays and watching the Huskers play for the national championship each and every year. We are glad you went elsewhere. We only want young men who really want to play for the Huskers. Adrian, you said you wanted to play for the Huskers since the ninth grade? Hmmm.

Mike Thiem

Highland Village, Texas

Top Play

The play of the year in the 1999 season was Dan Alexander, Nebraska running back, outracing Ben Kelly, Colorado defensive back, on an 80-yard touchdown run.

Kelly is one of the fastest players in college football, but he could not catch Alexander.



Ralph Kilzer
Loveland, Colo.

Don't Forget Novak

I would like to set the record straight about varsity football players at NU starting all games in a football career.

Tom "Trainwreck" Novak holds that honor, as he started every game in his four years (37), made all-conference all four years with teams that won only 11 games, made All-America in 1949 and played under three different head coaches. Quite a feat to say the least.

George Remar
Omaha, Neb.

Cornerback Ralph Brown set the school record for starting 52 consecutive games, every game of his four-year career at Nebraska. With his start against Tennessee in the Jan. 2 Fiesta Bowl, Ralph Brown passed place-kicker Kris Brown, who started 51 straight games from 1995-1998. — Editor

Devaney Legacy

On this day (Jan. 27) 38 years ago, a great inaugural address took place in

Lincoln. The new Cornhusker football coach said something powerful. Bob Devaney said "I don't want to win enough to be on probation. I just want to win enough to demand an investigation." This showed his willingness to get the Cornhuskers moving.

Do you remember Sept. 29, 1962? That win over Michigan helped the team so much. Just two years later, the Wolverines beat OSU in Columbus and wound up winning the Rose Bowl over Oregon State. To make it better, this win was in Devaney's native state.

This man always won with class and also lost with class. There were no alibis, and, if the team played well, he would say so. Here was a man who had very good people working with him. So many were touched by him.

When he became athletic director in 1965, he kept improving the facilities. He never told Coach Osborne how to run a football team. You can see why NU was able to improve under Osborne and that Coach Solich will keep them up there.

The Devaney legacy is a lot better than some recent presidents.

George R. Rosner
Schenectady, N.Y.

Seeing Red

I am a born and raised Cornhusker now living in Utah.

I was watching ESPN on Jan. 2, and they showed the nominations for College Team of the Decade, and they did not include the Huskers. But Florida State was in there, and that made me mad. I feel that the Huskers should be in there. I feel and all of my home state of Nebraska feel that the Huskers are the team of the decade if not the century.

I hope we have a shot at FSU next year for the national title, and we will see who is the best team. I look forward to next year.

Vince Morales
Provo, Utah

Got Something To Say?

Please send your comments and questions to: Letters, 3210 NW 3rd St., Lincoln, Neb. 68521. You can also fax them to us at (402) 474-5132. We reserve the right to edit the letters for clarity, content and length. For those with electronic mail abilities, Hleditor@aol.com.

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Jamrog Returns



Jeff Jamrog

Former Nebraska player named new defensive line coach

Jeff Jamrog's name came up immediately. The morning after Nebraska's Fiesta Bowl game victory against Tennessee, and Charlie McBride's emotional announcement that he was stepping aside, the speculation that Jamrog would replace McBride as defensive line coach began.

By the time Coach Frank Solich introduced Jamrog at a news conference on Jan. 21, there was no doubt among reporters in attendance about who the new defensive line coach was.

"We would like to make an announcement that many of you apparently have known about for some time, (that) maybe some of you have known about before I did," Solich said.

Solich had indicated a preference to hiring a coach with ties to the program as McBride's replacement, providing, of course, he possessed the other qualifications.

And Jamrog did. "I know Jeff very well," said Solich. "It's a name that not only I thought of immediately in terms of the possibility to replace Charlie as defensive line coach but other coaches on our staff thought of Jeff immediately. And they were not shy in throwing his name my way."

Jamrog lettered three seasons at Nebraska (1985-87) and spent two seasons as a Cornhusker graduate assistant (1988-89) before becoming a full-time assistant at South Dakota.

After four seasons at South Dakota, he moved to the University of Nebraska-Omaha (1994-96) and then to New Mexico State, where he served as defensive coor-



Jeff Jamrog was a Husker in 1987.

dinator for three seasons under Coach Tony Samuel, a former Cornhusker defensive end and his position coach at Nebraska.

The decision to leave New Mexico State was difficult, Jamrog said, because "Tony means a great deal to me. But I tell you what, he's been first class. He's been behind this move 100 percent — not 95, not 90, 100 percent — because he knows what Nebraska football has meant to him."

Samuel has built his staff at New Mexico State with assistants that have Nebraska ties. He replaced Jamrog with Marvin Sanders, a Cornhusker defensive back from 1987 to 1989.

In addition to having played at Nebraska, Jamrog is from the state, as is his wife Connie.

They have three children: Elizabeth (9), Brett (7) and Jared (4).

Jamrog walked on following a multi-sport career at Elkhorn Mt. Michael High School and became a

regular at defensive end for two seasons, starting as a senior, when he also was an Academic All-American. Former Cornhusker assistant Cletus Fischer recruited him, promising "me I would start as a freshman," Jamrog said, joking. "I didn't know he meant the freshman team."

"I thought he meant (start on) the varsity."

His background was a significant factor in the hiring decision, according to Solich.

That he was a former player is "probably good," said Solich. "But really what is probably even more important to me is just maybe having the opportunity to know someone a little bit."

"We have great chemistry at Nebraska. That will continue with Jeff."

The 35-year-old Jamrog, who has a master's degree in business administration, was well-prepared for the news conference, speaking from notes and referring to things that indicated his familiarity with the Cornhuskers' success in their recently completed 12-

1 season.

Though he coached inside linebackers in addition to be defensive coordinator at New Mexico State, Jamrog said he was comfortable with the prospect of coaching the defensive line.

In addition to having coached the defensive line for one season at UNO, "any time you are defensive coordinator, you understand 11 guys and what their job entails," he said.

Jamrog becomes the fourth former Cornhusker on Solich's staff — with Solich's also having played at Nebraska. The others are Craig Bohl, linebackers coach and McBride's successor as defensive coordinator; Turner Gill, quarterbacks coach; and Dave Gillespie, running backs coach.

Jamrog doesn't consider himself as replacing McBride. "The way I look at it is, you really don't replace people; I think you step up in the position they had," he said.

But the bottom line is, "I'm excited about being back." ■

JUST THE BEGINNING

I-back Dan Alexander finished first in the performance index during the Cornhusker football team's pre-winter conditioning tests, conducted in late January. The senior-to-be also posted the best time in the 40-yard dash, running :04.50, and was second in the 10-yard dash, running :01.58.

Several key players didn't participate in the testing, among them quarterback Eric Crouch, middle linebacker Carlos Polk, wingback Bobby Newcombe and split end Matt Davison.

Crouch is recovering from arthroscopic surgery on his right shoulder. Polk was on crutches following ankle



I-back Dan Alexander tests his vertical jump.

surgery the day before the testing. Newcombe is competing as a sprinter with the track team this spring. And Davison is playing for the Cornhusker basketball team.

"This is just the starting point. Now it's up to the athletes to apply themselves," said Boyd Epley, director of athletic performance.

"The work doesn't get done by itself."

Testing leaders:

PERFORMANCE INDEX

Alexander	3,063
Kyle Vanden Bosch, RE	2,710
Jon Clanton, DT	2,442
Rod Baker, LB	2,337
Scott Aguglia, WR	2,328

10-YARD DASH

Ben Cornelson, WR	1.57
Alexander	1.58
Jeff Hemje, DB	1.58
Erwin Swiney, DB	1.60
Tyler Rauenzahn, DB	1.60
Josh Davis, WR	1.60

10-YARD DASH POINTS

Alexander	979
Brian Wanish, DL (1.80)	694
Dominic Raiola, C (1.73)	694
Vanden Bosch (1.67)	694
Baker (1.63)	656

40-YARD DASH

Alexander	4.50
Dwayne McClary, DB	4.64
Davis	4.65

40-YARD DASH POINTS

Alexander	954
Vanden Bosch (4.85)	656
Clanton (4.98)	630

PRO AGILITY RUN

Jeremy Bender, WR	3.88
Randy Stella, LB	3.95
Aguglia	3.95
Alexander	3.99

PRO AGILITY RUN POINTS

Vanden Bosch (4.09)	810
Clanton (4.16)	799
Alexander	788

VERTICAL JUMP

Josh Anderson, DB	35
Damien Bauman, TE	34
Jammal Lord, QB	34
Dahrran Diedrick, IB	33.5
Swiney	33.5
Josh Brown, K	33.5
Wilson Thomas, WR	33.5

VERTICAL JUMP POINTS

Bauman	615
Lord	571
Baker	565

(Note: Bauman has petitioned the NCAA for a sixth season of eligibility.)

QUICK HITS

What's Happening In Nebraska Athletics?

TEN JUST NOT ENOUGH

Nebraska has been criticized in recent seasons, unfairly at times, for its non-conference football schedules. But with no natural non-conference rivals — such as Florida State has with Miami and Florida, for example — the Cornhuskers are having problems just finding Division I-A opponents.

They have only two non-conference games scheduled for the 2001 season, which would give them only 10 games total, a considerable concern to Athletic Director Bill Byrne.

Ideally, Byrne would like to find another non-conference opponent willing to come to Lincoln, for a seventh home game in 2001. Notre Dame and Rice are already set to play at Memorial Stadium.

The opening on the schedule is a result of Texas Christian's having pulled out of an agreement. Al Papik, senior associate athletic director emeritus, is working on the problem.

"We can find (Division) I-AA teams to play," said Byrne.

But the preference, of course, is a I-A opponent.

The Cornhuskers also have only 10 games scheduled for the 2002 season, when they begin a two-year, home-and-home series with Penn State. And though they have an 11-game schedule set for the 2003 season, including a game at Southern Mississippi, the NCAA will allow 12 games then.

Nebraska has tried to fill some of the openings with "name" opponents, according to Byrne. But there are problems doing that. The Cornhuskers had an oral agreement with Michigan for a home-and-home series, following the Penn State series and beginning in the 2004 season, he said.

But Michigan didn't follow through and Nebraska scheduled Pittsburgh instead.

BEST IN THE BIG 12

With Big 12 championships in football, volleyball and soccer already this school year, Nebraska is well on its way to another all-sports conference title. But that isn't the only measure of success, according to Byrne. "Some schools think they're successful if their teams win," he said.

"Our goal is to have a complete support system for our athletes, coaches and staff."

That system includes such things as academics, nutrition, tutoring, strength and conditioning and facilities as well as marketing, licensing and fund-raising, said Byrne.

IN MEMORIAM

Former Cornhusker wrestler Gary Albright died in a professional wrestling ring while performing at a show promoted by his father-in-law in Hazleton, Pa., in January. He was 38.

The reported cause of death was cardiac arrest.

Albright, who wrestled at Nebraska in the mid-1980s, had been a professional wrestler in several promotions, performing most recently in Japan under various aliases as well as his own name.

He was a celebrity in Japan, a two-time tag-team champion.

"He wore his Nebraska singlets all the way through," said NU Coach Tim Neumann, who supplied him with the red singlets, bearing a white "N" on the chest — size XXXL.

BRIEFLY NOTED

— KaLena Barnes, a sprinter on the Nebraska track team, was the only woman to participate in the pre-winter conditioning tests. The junior from Ontario, Calif., would like to try out as a kicker.

"We've had women test over the years, not a great many but a few," Epley said.

— Josh Brown, the Cornhusker football team's place-kicker as a redshirt freshman, is competing for the track and field team as a high jumper. Brown was a two-time state champion in Oklahoma.

Brown's personal best in the high jump in high school was 6-foot-8. He participated in pre-winter conditioning tests then hustled back to the Devaney Sports Center for track practice.

In addition to Brown and Bobby Newcombe, a New Mexico state champion in the 100 meters (10.71 seconds), the 200 meters (21.41), the 400 (48.68) and the long jump (22 feet, 7 inches), football players Dwayne McClary and Keyuo Craver are competing as sprinters on the track team.

— Staci Wolfe, an assistant at Florida the last five years, was hired as an assistant by new head volleyball coach John Cook. Wolfe was a four-year starter at Colorado (1991-94). "I had watched Staci and I thought she was a rising star," Cook told the Lincoln Journal Star. ■

It's Time To Get Over It

*Talented recruiting class almost overshadowed
by the one that got away*



**Brian
HILL**

I KNOW. Most Nebraska fans probably can't believe that Carlyle Holiday picked Notre Dame over the Huskers.

After all, he was one of four quarterbacks to sign with the Irish, and he would have been Nebraska's only recruit at that position.

His main reason for not picking Nebraska may well have been Eric Crouch. The Husker starter is coming off an outstanding season and has two years remaining. Behind him is promising redshirt freshman Jammal Lord.

The Irish, meanwhile, have only a relatively untested junior coming back to replace two-year starter Jarious Jackson.

Holiday took both schools to the wire before announcing his choice the morning of signing day, Feb. 2.

Nebraska is left with just two scholarship quarterbacks, not counting Bobby Newcombe who moved to wingback early last season. Walk-on Joe Chrisman should also be available when spring practice begins March 20. In addition, quarterbacks Scott Siefken of Boerne, Texas, and Donnie Sizemore of Diamond Bar, Calif., have said they plan to

walk on next season.

Nebraska fans probably will be hoping that Holiday gets in the game, when the Huskers visit South Bend on Sept. 9. Facing the Blackshirts as a true freshman might make the San Antonio native reconsider his decision.

The players who didn't pick Nebraska — Holiday and safety Adrian Mayes of Houston, who switched to LSU — stole some of the attention from an outstanding class of 21 athletes who did sign with the Huskers. In this issue of *Huskers Illustrated*, you'll find extensive coverage of the Class of 2000.

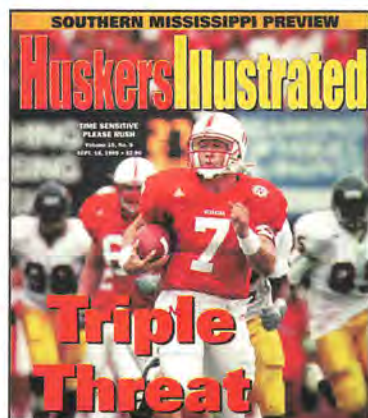
In addition, contributing editor Mike Babcock has written several interesting stories on the career of Charlie McBride, who retired as defensive coordinator after the Jan. 2 Fiesta Bowl. The section includes a story about Charlie as an athlete. He was a pretty good one.

Speaking of former coaches, you probably know that Tom Osborne has decided to seek Nebraska's 3rd District House seat. He'll be tough to beat, just like he was on the sidelines.

Next month, we'll preview spring football, which culminates with the annual Spring Game April 15.

Stay tuned. ■

It's almost that time again!
Watch for the Huskers Illustrated
Spring Football Preview in the April issue
(available March 22)



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Green Isn't His Favorite Color

Crouch solidifies leadership role by playing with pain



**Mike
BABCOCK**

FRANK SOLICH CONSIDERED taking along a green practice jersey to the hospital when he visited Eric Crouch, following arthroscopic surgery on Crouch's right shoulder.

"But I decided not to do that," Solich said with a smile.

Crouch has an aversion to green practice jerseys, which are assigned to selected offensive players to keep them healthy. When defenders see green, they're sup-

posed to ease up.

Crouch wore a green jersey last spring, and he'll wear one this spring when his shoulder has healed from the surgery and he's able to participate in practice. Solich will see to that.

But there's no sense in waving a green jersey in his face right now.

Even though he's a year older, Crouch hasn't softened on the issue. A green jersey "kind of takes you out of the rhythm of the game," he said. "But like I talked about last year, that (wearing one) wasn't my decision. And if I had the choice to make, I definitely wouldn't (wear one)."

That's not to say he would argue about wearing the green, however. "If it's to keep me healthy and make sure I'm ready for the first week of the season, then that's what it takes because, you know, I don't need any freak injuries or anything even potentially causing injury," said Crouch.

Defensive tackle Loran Kaiser would second that.

Crouch "is probably the key guy on our team," he said.

The sophomore quarterback was certainly the key guy on this season's team. His emergence was the essential element in the No. 2- and No. 3-ranked Cornhuskers' 12-1 success.

Without Crouch as the starter from the third game on, Nebraska wouldn't have come within just a couple of turnovers at Texas of playing for the national championship. And without him, the Cornhuskers wouldn't already be receiving consideration for the top spot in the pre-season polls.

Crouch was impressive, a fact reflected by his sharing the conference coaches' award as Big 12 offensive player of the year along with Texas's Major Applewhite.

He led Nebraska in rushing as well as in passing, running for 889 yards and 16 touchdowns — the most by a major college quarterback — on a team-high 180 carries and completing 83-of-160 passes (51.9 percent) for 1,269 yards and seven touchdowns with only four interceptions.

But those numbers, as impressive as they are, don't reflect the toughness and determination Crouch displayed. He played with soreness in his right shoulder that might

have sidelined others.

He dismisses it now. "I was conscious of it, but when you get in a game, (with) some of those emotions you're feeling, you're out there thinking about other things than some of the pain your body's going through," he said. "So a lot of times, I wasn't feeling it until . . . Sunday morning."

"I got through the year and that was the most important part of it."

The shoulder problem affected his passing the most, of course. "As far as coming out and being ready for a game, I'd probably say I was around 75 percent, 75 or 80 percent," he said.

"To me, I had an all right year throwing the ball. I wanted to have a better year. You always have room for improvement. You always want to be better than you were the last time."

Among his goals is to "throw the ball better than I did last year, have a better percentage, put the right type of touch on it when I need to and be able to throw the frozen rope again."

Few people were aware of the constant pain in his shoulder, which required regular icing, in much the same way a baseball pitcher might ice his arm. "There were times when it was pretty painful to throw," said Crouch. "At practice, they'd kind of hold me out a few reps or a few stations, just to make sure I was ready for the game on Saturday because that was the most important thing."

Neither he nor Solich discussed the shoulder for fear opponents might focus on it. "I think that's probably the main reason why it was kind of kept quiet through the whole year," Crouch said. "It was something I was playing with. That's part of the game. Sometimes you play

with pain."

His playing with pain solidified his leadership. "Eric has displayed toughness really throughout his career, but especially this season," Solich said. "I think all the players really appreciated that. And certainly he gained a lot of respect for how he went about things this season in their eyes."

"It wasn't a deal where we had to push him back on the field."

Solich did have to push him to wear a green practice jersey, however.

"He's one of the toughest guys I've met," said Kaiser. "He's as tough as they come. You could tell that back in the days of that damn green practice jersey they always used to slap on him."

"He didn't like it any more than we did."

But he'll almost certainly be wearing one again. ■



Eric Crouch's emergence was the key to a 12-1 season.

Mike Babcock is a former sports columnist for the Lincoln Journal Star. He has covered Nebraska football for more than 20 years. Mike can be reached at mdb@inetnebr.com or P.O. Box 6782, Lincoln, NE 68506.

The Pieces Are In Place

Future starters get valuable experience to keep growing pains to a minimum



Bob SCHALLER

GETTING COMFORTABLE.

That's what the last two seasons have been for the University of Nebraska football team.

Think this was all about Frank Solich learning how to be a head coach?

Hardly, though that was part of the equation. A new coach for the running backs and a relatively new coach for rush ends had to learn their jobs through and through. Nebraska's power game on offense and attacking style on defense look simple enough, but only because they are executed so flawlessly. The systems are actually among the most complex in the country, but the coaching staff's translation to the players, and the players' subsequent execution on the field, make it appear as though the system is far less complicated than it really is.

There have been new players to integrate — and even positions to settle on for key players.

Part of the key to the national championships was the continuity of the coaching staff and the wealth of developed talent passing through Lincoln during those years. The coaches made the yearly transition of players easier during those years by getting plenty of playing time for the future starters, so the fast pace of the game was already digested before those players took the reins in their hands.

Nebraska's system thrives on the physical aspect: On defense, they beat up opponents and grind them into the turf, both physically and, through the course of the game, mentally. On offense, the key is to grind and grind until the defense is ground up. To do that, however, it takes a good rotation of players on both sides of the ball. After moving away from that in his first year a little bit, Solich seemed more willing to get backups a lot more playing time this past season.

So when Jon Rutherford has to step in for Adam Julch, or Chris Kelsay has to step in for Aaron Wills, there won't be an adjustment period because these players have a lot of game experience under their belts.

The Huskers also recommitted to the run — at least statistically — the last half of the season. The success of that philosophy and attitude was never more apparent than against Tennessee. Nebraska put together two drives of 90-plus yards that were 90 percent running plays. Solich explained that they had to run it while they were at or inside their own 5-yard-line because there was "no other" choice.

However, the fact that Nebraska can run when it has to run — and when its opponents most expect it to run and put 9 or 10 guys in the dreaded "box" — shows that the core of the Huskers' offensive system is very well and sound. So regardless of how some Nebraska fans are turned on by the

passing game, Nebraska can — and likely will — continue to have the most success when it can beat the ball down the throat of its opponent.

Talk radio was bombarded after games with concerns about the I-back situation. There is still no burner, a la Ahman Green or Calvin Jones. But that Nebraska could dismantle the likes of Tennessee and Texas in the second half of the season with I-backs who were far from the Nebraska prototype only bears out the fact that the offensive line — and offensive philosophy — will always be the key to NU's success when it has the ball.

With a "new" defensive coordinator in Craig Bohl, Nebraska will again go through some growing pains. The only knock on Bohl is that he isn't as gregarious or emotional as Charlie McBride. But that is irrelevant. The man can — and will — do the job. Besides, filling McBride's shoes will be tough enough without trying to clone him. Bohl will make his own mark, perhaps by what he doesn't say instead of what he does say. And there is a new defensive line coach — Jeff Jamrog — to bring along.

There seems to be a lot of concern about the secondary, with the loss of two of Nebraska's best-ever defensive backs, Mike Brown and Ralph Brown. Though Mike's physical play will be missed on the run and Ralph's cover skills were amazing, the secondary will have plenty of experienced players. Joe Walker and Clint Finley have plenty of game time. Keyuo Craver simply has the most natural talent of anyone I've ever seen at cornerback, and the return of a healthy Erwin Swiney could once again leave the secondary as one of the strengths of a loaded defense, which has to only answer some questions at outside linebacker to be as good as this past year's defense.

Only the kicking game has serious questions hovering around it entering the spring, though it would be nice to have a couple of I-backs that we haven't heard from make some noise.

The loss in leadership from the Browns, Tony Ortiz, Steve Warren, Julch and T.J. DeBates is what will be missed the most. The Huskers haven't lost this many leaders since the end of the 1995 season.

But the important thing is the pieces are in place. There is talent and some good depth, though developing more depth is a challenge the Huskers face every season.

So it should be a quiet spring and summer for the Nebraska football team.

And no news is not good news for teams that will have to line up against the Big Red this fall. ■



Craig Bohl takes over as defensive coordinator.

Bob Schaller covers the Huskers for the Scottsbluff Star-Herald. He has also written several books, including "Touchdown Tommie" and "Roar of Silence: The Kenny Walker Story." Bob can be reached at schallerrc@aol.com.

More Than A One-Year Wonder

*Opponents won't be caught off guard
by defending Big 12 Tournament champion*



**Curt
McKeever**

DAVE VAN HORN BRISTLES at the thought of someone suggesting that what his Nebraska baseball team accomplished last season might have been a fluke.

But no way does that mean Van Horn expects to scribble down a lineup and sit back and stroll to another 42-18 record, NCAA Regional berth and Big 12 Conference Tournament championship. But with a veteran group returning, the

Cornhuskers' third-year coach isn't ready to concede any of those prizes, either.

The difference this year is Nebraska's opponents won't be caught off guard again.

"The coaches in this league are outstanding and they recognize we're bringing a better team," he said. "We kept getting better our first year here, we got better last year, and we're going to have a good team. I don't think anybody in this league thinks Nebraska was a one-year fluke."

Like last season, Van Horn will put his team through a challenging early schedule on three successive weekend trips to Texas leading up to Big 12 play.

The Huskers were to open at the University of Rice Tournament Feb. 11-13, playing the 1999 College World Series qualifier Owls in the second game, and Van Horn's previous school, Northwestern (La.) State in game three. From there, they head to Arlington, Texas for a three-game tournament, that includes a game against Van Horn's alma mater, Arkansas, then come back for a three-game set at Texas-San Antonio.

NU then starts its 11-weekend tour through the Big 12 with a three-game set at perennial power Oklahoma State March 3-5.

"To be honest with you, if we were picking teams to do well, I'd pick them high," Baylor Coach Steve Smith said of the Huskers. "They've got their Friday starter back, and that's a real important thing. And I think so much of (Van Horn) and his ability to teach. They're going to work very hard and be sound fundamentally."

"Now, he has a challenge. Everybody up there has a unique challenge because of geography. But the thing that gives Nebraska the edge on the rest of (northern schools) is simply the name Nebraska. He's not going to have to explain to somebody in California about the University of Nebraska."

NU beat Smith's team 4-3 to win the 1999 Big 12 championship. Returning from that bunch are six everyday starters, three starting pitchers and two key relievers. And some unknowns expected to have immediate impact.

Nebraska won't be able to replace Ken Harvey, the nation's leading hitter in 1999, with one player. But Van Horn has enough talent that he believes the lineup will be

better offensively all the way through, and it will thrive even if it doesn't have an eye-popping individual.

Because of the experiences, Van Horn is shifting some players around to maximize athletic ability.

John Cole, the team's top hitter at the end of last year who also made a leaping catch to preserve the Big 12 championship, has moved from left field to second base. He fought a groin injury through fall practice but was running sprints in late January.

Brandt Vlieger, who drove in a pair of runs in the league title game, is playing third instead of shortstop, while last year's second baseman Will Bolt is sliding to short. Vlieger broke an ankle on the last day of fall practice and was less than full speed when the season began.

Center fielder Jamal Strong will be a catalyst both offensively and defensively. The senior from Altadena, Calif., who sat out fall practice in order to clear up some academic concerns, stole 34 bases while batting .346 in the leadoff position last season. That's 26 shy of the steals mark set by Scott Hooper in 1984. But Van Horn sounds confident Strong will make a run toward the record book.

"You've gotta like being that Ricky Henderson-type guy," he said. "I know some guys are thinking about leading the game off with a home run. Jamal's thinking about leading the game off with a single, stealing second and third on the first two pitches, and I like that mentality. He wants to get in scoring position and score a run for us and get us going."

That's his thing."

Pitching coach Rob Childress has a loaded deck, as last year's wins leader, Scott Fries, and the top two starters, Shane Komine and Chad Wiles return. Wiles was dominant down the stretch, winning five straight decisions before running out of steam in the NCAA Regional.

Komine, sidelined most of the latter half with a back injury, has taken to swimming for conditioning and, according to Van Horn, has never looked better.

The top middle reliever, R.D. Spiehs, and Steve Hale, back from an arm injury, also will get plenty of innings on a staff Van Horn is touting as much deeper than 1999.

NU finished last season ranked No. 25 by ESPN-USA Today and Baseball America. Considering Van Horn's expectations of this team, tickets for the 2001 season, when the Huskers are scheduled to move into a new stadium, just might be a hot item.

At Nebraska? Who would have ever thought that?

"There are more players than scholarships, so it's really a matter of how hard you want to work," Baylor's Smith said. "I think they'll be the program of the North." ■



**Dave Van Horn will put
his team through a chal-
lenging early schedule.**

Curt McKeever is a sportswriter, covering the University of Nebraska for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football he is the primary beat writer for the men's basketball and baseball teams.

RECRUITING WRAPUP

No QBs in Class

Solich would have liked a quarterback, but says he's pleased with 21 new signees

By Mike Babcock

Carlyle Holiday's signing of a letter of intent with Notre Dame was probably bigger news in Nebraska than it was in South Bend, Ind. That's just a guess. But it's an educated one.

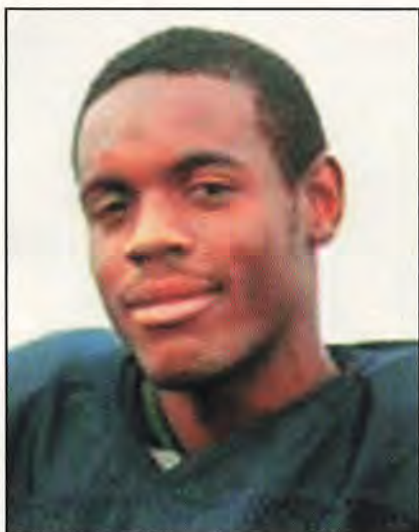
Football is as much of a passion at Notre Dame as it is at Nebraska. But the Fighting Irish are so accustomed to recruiting highly publicized players that Holiday, a quarterback at Roosevelt High School in San Antonio, Texas, isn't likely to become a celebrity there until he proves himself.

That's even more likely in Holiday's case since Notre Dame signed three other quarterbacks.

Nebraska didn't sign any, however, which was among the reasons Holiday's name came up during Coach Frank Solich's news conference to announce the Cornhuskers' 2000 recruiting class.

Frank Solich's third Nebraska recruiting class included four offensive linemen, four linebackers, four wide receivers and three defensive backs.





Redshirt freshman Jammal Lord (above) is the only scholarship quarterback on the team behind junior-to-be Eric Crouch (right).

Lord "we think, without question, can run the option the way we want. He's very physical, very tough, makes you miss, and will be an excellent quarterback for us."

— Frank Solich

"We would have liked to have gotten a quarterback this year," Solich said.

But Holiday's decision to go to Notre Dame and the notable lack of any other quarterbacks doesn't diminish the quality of Nebraska's 21-player recruiting class, according to Solich.

"If it goes to a point where we have injuries at the quarterback spot . . . and all of a sudden you're playing guys that are inexperienced, that's going to be a little bit of a setback," he said.

But the offense is diversified enough "that we do not have to be quarterback-dominant."

Solich was talking about a worst-case scenario, of course. Eric Crouch, who shared the Big 12 coaches' award as conference offensive player of the year, will be just a junior.



So as long as he remains healthy, the Cornhuskers will be set for two more seasons.

The concern is depth, now and in the future. There are no experienced quarterbacks behind him. And there is only one other scholarship quarterback on the team — Jammal Lord, a redshirt freshman.

Lord "we think, without question, can run the option the way we want," Solich said. "He's very physical, very tough, makes you miss, and will be an excellent quarterback for us."

"If we did not have Jammal in the system, I would look a little pale."

Even though he was joking, the lack of scholarship quarterbacks is unique. Lord is one of only two Nebraska has signed since 1997, when Crouch and Bobby Newcombe arrived.

Carl Crawford, a quarterback from Houston, joined Lord in signing a year ago but subsequently gave up football to sign a professional baseball contract as a high draft pick.

The Cornhuskers didn't sign any scholarship quarterbacks in 1998, and they signed only one the year before Crouch and Newcombe — Clint Finley, who was quickly moved to the secondary.

As a result, the quarterbacks behind Crouch and Lord will be walkons, including Joe Chrisman, a redshirted freshman from Longmont, Colo., who played only briefly in three games.

In addition, "we will bring in two walk-on quarterbacks that we feel are talented," said Solich, who cannot identify or comment on walk-on players until they have enrolled at the university.

That won't happen until the fall, and most likely not until classes begin.

The presence of Crouch and Newcombe, who could step in at quarterback in a crisis, has affected the Cornhuskers' ability to recruit quarterbacks the last two years, according to Solich. "There's no question that those two are known around the country as tremendous players," he said.

"And not everybody wants to come in and battle those guys."

Quarterback or not, the 21 scholarship recruits, including junior college transfer Thunder Collins, the only running back among the newcomers, should meet the Cornhuskers' needs.

Collins, who will be a sophomore in eligibility, had planned to enroll at Nebraska for second semester and participate in spring practice. But he did not meet an NCAA rule requiring junior college transfers to complete at least 25 percent of their credit hours at the last school they attended.

So Collins will take nine credit hours at Southeast Community College in Lincoln.

That problem is only a "little bit of a setback," said Solich.

Collins, who will report with the freshman in the fall, "has a chance to be the kind of player that can play right away," Solich said. "We look forward to putting him in the mix."

With the loss of weakside linebackers Julius Jackson and Eric Johnson and strongside linebackers Brian Shaw and Tony Ortiz, those positions were a recruiting priority.

So were offensive linemen. "I think that's one position you'd better continually recruit very well at or else you're going to find yourself, probably, in a little trouble," Solich said.

The class includes four linebackers and four offensive linemen, as well as four wide receivers.

"We feel we got the right guys," said Solich. "We feel we were able to cover a lot of the bases that it takes to continue to have an outstanding team. So I feel very good about it."

Although he declined to assign a letter grade to the recruiting class, "they're the type of players, the type of people that we want here," he said. "There isn't one who did not show that he wanted, from really very early on and for a very long time, to be a part of Nebraska football."

"I think that makes a great deal of difference in terms of what these guys bring and what they'll do when they get here in terms of work ethic and what you'll get out of them."

"We'll see when they get here how it all plays out. But I think it's an excellent class and would certainly compare with any class we've had for a while."

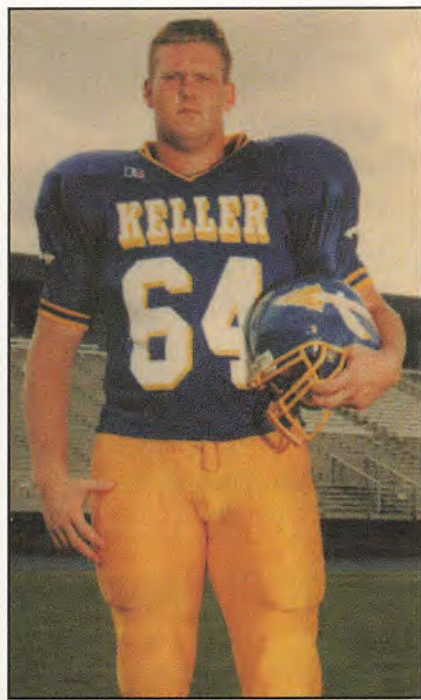
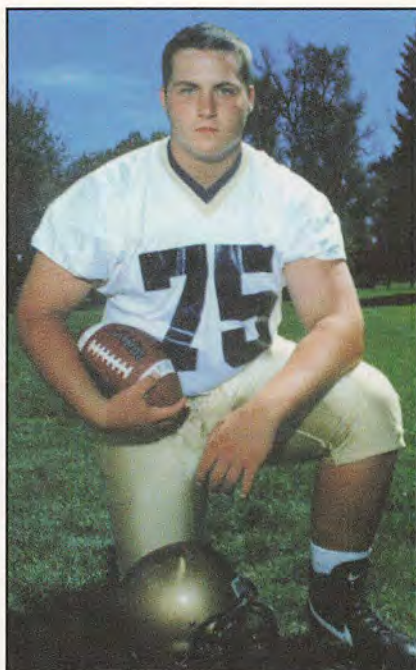
As has been the case in recent seasons, nearly all of the athletes made oral commitments to Nebraska relatively early in the recruiting process. Alvin Marshall, a wide receiver from Locke High School in Los Angeles, was the last to commit orally, just before the signing date on Feb. 3.

Marshall's signing offset the loss of Adrian Mayes, a defensive back from Houston who backed out of an oral commitment to Nebraska on the morning letters of intent could be signed. Mayes had told Solich the day before that he was coming to Nebraska. But he signed with Louisiana State.

The loss of Mayes probably wasn't as significant as Holiday's decision to go to Notre Dame, if for no other reason than the fact that the Cornhuskers signed three defensive backs.

Too much attention was focused on Holiday and Mayes as far as Solich was concerned. "This is supposed to be good news," he said with a laugh as he finished the news conference. "A lot of attention seems to be on who is not here. Those who didn't come do not diminish who is coming."

Neither does the absence of a quarterback, whether Holiday or someone else.



Offensive Line Recruits

The four offensive linemen in the recruiting class are (clockwise from top left) Jake Andersen of Littleton, Colo., Mike Erickson of Omaha, Neb., Nick Povendo of Keller, Texas, and M.J. Flaum of Westminster, Colo.

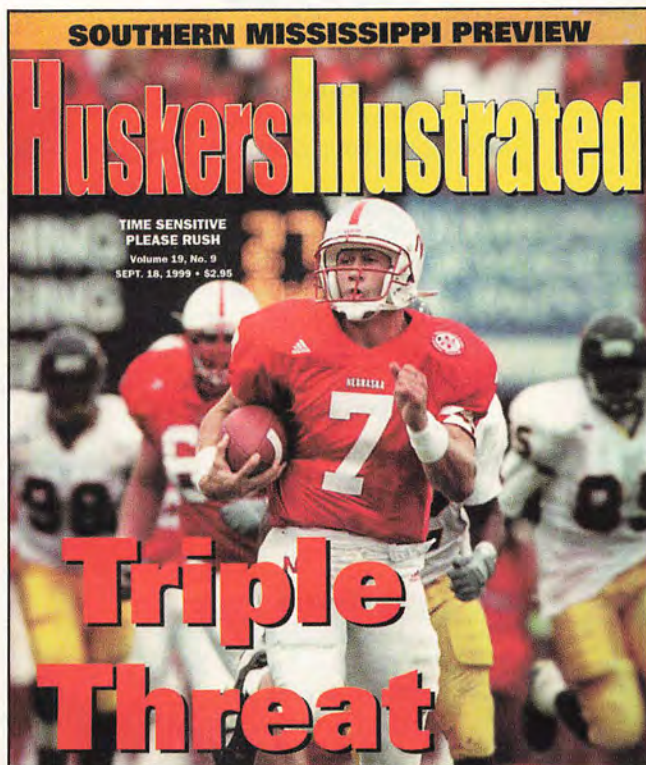
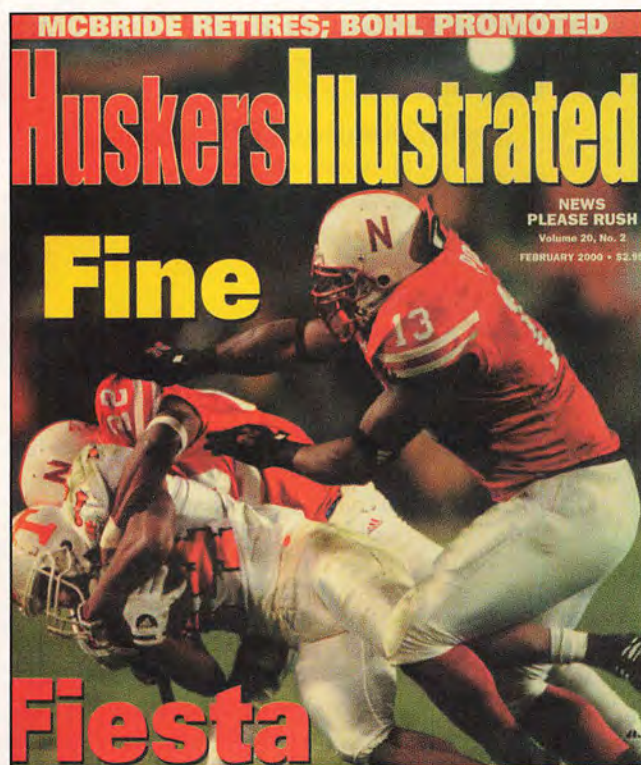
"It's not like we won't have guys that will know how to run our offense," said Solich. "They may not run it like Eric does right now, but on the other side of it, I've been preaching all along that we can do a lot of different things on offense, and it's important to be able to do a lot of things on offense."

"With that in mind, that means you have an offense you can certain-

ly highlight whatever position you feel you need to highlight. And we can do that because of our formations, because of our schemes and because of the talent that we have on our football team."

"So even though we would have liked to have a (freshman) scholarship quarterback in the system this year, it won't be the case. We should be more attractive next year." ■

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Class of 2000

(By Position)

I-BACK

Thunder Collins

East Los Angeles College, 6-2, 200

FULLBACK

Steve Kriewald

Scotia (North Loup-Scotia), 5-11, 250

WIDE RECEIVER

DeWayne Long Jr.

West Des Moines (Dowling) Iowa, 6-0, 200

Alvin Marshall

Los Angeles (Locke), 5-11, 180

Ross Pilkington

Fort Collins (Loveland), Colo., 6-1, 185

Ben Zajicek

Beatrice, Neb., 6-0, 200

TIGHT END

Chris Septak

Omaha (Millard West), Neb., 6-4, 245

OFFENSIVE LINE

Jake Andersen

Littleton (Mullen), Colo., 6-2, 300

Mike Erickson

Omaha (Papillion-LaVista), Neb., 6-4, 275

M.J. Flaum

Westminster (Northglenn), Colo., 6-4, 295

Nick Povendo

Keller, Texas, 6-5, 305

DEFENSIVE BACK

Willie Amos

Sweetwater, Texas, 6-2, 185

Lornell McPherson

Omaha (Central), Neb., 5-10, 175

Terrell Butler

Austell (Pebblebrook), Ga., 5-11, 195

LINEBACKER

Ira Cooper

Omaha (Westside), Neb., 6-2, 220

T.J. Hollowell

Copperas Cove, Texas, 6-1, 215

Lannie Hopkins

Rowlett, Texas, 6-1, 195

Jason Richenberger

Liberty, Mo., 6-1, 200

RUSH END

Manaia Brown

Salt Lake City (Granger), Utah, 6-4, 280

Bernard Thomas

East Palo Alto (St. Francis), Calif., 6-4, 235

KICKER/PUNTER

Sandro DeAngelis

Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada (St. Joseph Collegiate),
5-9, 200

Capsules compiled by James Hale

Class of 2000

Willie Amos

**Defensive Back
Sweetwater, Texas**

Height: 6-2

Weight: 185

Speed: 4.38

**DOB: July 28,
1982**

TEAM'S 1999 RECORD: 4-6.

OFFENSE: I-formation, wishbone (running back)

HONORS: Texas top 100 team; first team All-District and All-Area; honorable mention All-State

OTHER SPORTS: None

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS: Drawing of pastels with a regular pencil

CAPSULE: Amos has been a standout running back in high school but will move to defensive back at Nebraska. This past season, Amos rushed for 1,400 yards and 15 touchdowns. For his career, Amos rushed for 3,824 and 37 touchdowns. Amos made a Texas all-star team that competed in the Outback Bowl in Australia last summer. As a side sport, Amos is a national jump rope champion and competes with a world jump rope team that has traveled to Disney World the last three years to compete.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH HAND DOWELL:

"Willie is an extremely talented athlete that is very fast, can cut on a dime and is very versatile. He has played running back for us all through school, but I am sure he will be a DB at Nebraska."

FRANK SOLICH:

"Willie will play as an inside defensive back for us. He's a safety-rover type of guy. He also is very talented on the offensive side as an I-back. He is a tremendous hitter, and we think he will be a great player for us inside."

WHY WILLIE CHOSE NEBRASKA:

"I was comfortable there. Their academic program is what I am looking for."

SELECTED NEBRASKA OVER: TCU and
Midwestern State

PARENTS: Michelle and Willie Brown.
Guardians: Rev. John Hamilton and Pamela Hamilton



Jake Andersen

Offensive Line
Denver, Colo.

(Mullen)

Height: 6-2

Weight: 300

Speed: 5.0

DOB: Aug. 10,
1982

TEAM'S 1999 RECORD: 10-2

OFFENSE/DEFENSE: Single back (right guard, fullback)/4-3 (defensive tackle)

HONORS: 44th best player in Midlands (SuperPrep Magazine); 10th best offensive lineman in Midlands (PrepStar); top 100 offensive linemen (Rival 100.com); fourth best player in Colorado (FirstDown Publications); first team All-State (Denver Post and Rocky Mountain News); first team All-Colorado (Denver Post)

OTHER SPORTS: Track (shot put: 55-0, discus: 150-0)

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS: Weightlifting, camping and fishing, construction.

CAPSULE: Jake is a four-year letterman and played both guard and center for one of the top teams in Colorado. Mullen won the state championship Andersen's junior year and played in the quarterfinals this past season. Andersen can bench 380 pounds, squats 650 and can powerlift 650. He averaged 10 pancake blocks per game.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH MICK MCCALL:

"Jake is a tremendous athlete, who has a great work ethic and who is always trying to make himself better. He has great strength and can play every position along the offensive line. He moves well for a player his size and is as good a run blocker as he is a pass blocker. We have won a lot of football games while Jake has been here and he has been a big reason why."

FRANK SOLICH:

"Jake is one of four offensive linemen in this class who we really like. He has all the athletic skills to be a great player for us and has the work ethic to always drive himself to be the best."

WHY JAKE CHOSE NEBRASKA:

"I fit real well at Nebraska with the type of offensive linemen they have and always play with. Their offense fits me to a tee. Nebraska's support system is second to none in all areas."

SELECTED NEBRASKA OVER: Offered scholarships by Colorado, Colorado State and USC, but only visited Nebraska

PARENTS: Keith and Debbie Andersen

Manaia Brown

Rush End

Salt Lake City, Utah

(Granger)

Height: 6-4

Weight: 280

Speed: 4.7

DOB: July 17, 1981

TEAM'S 1999 RECORD: 8-3

OFFENSE/DEFENSE: Run-n-shoot (tight end)/3-4 (defensive end)

HONORS: All-American, 47th best defensive lineman (SuperPrep); 25th best player in Midlands (SuperPrep); 20th best defensive lineman in country (Rivals100.com); three-time first team All-State; Region II Most Valuable Player

OTHER SPORTS: None

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS: Sports, music and movies.

CAPSULE: Brown is the second player the Huskers have signed out of Utah, joining freshman defensive tackle Ryon Bingham, who red-shirted in 1999. Brown had a monster senior season with 25 sacks and 70 total tackles. With his size, Brown could also play defensive tackle for the Huskers. Brown was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, and is Samoan. He is a friend of NU guard Toniui Fonoti and also knows Bingham.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH RAY GROTH:

"I have been in high school football for over 20 years, and Manaia is the best football player I have ever coached. He has the physical size and potential to go to the next level. However, what sets him apart from the other players is his speed and quickness. His work ethic is outstanding, and I don't think I will ever get the opportunity to coach another player like him."

FRANK SOLICH:

"Manaia is around 280 pounds and is a little different type of rush end than we have in our program right now. But, if you see his speed and quickness, you understand that he can play rush end at that weight and be truly effective."

WHY MANAIA CHOSE NEBRASKA:

"I really liked how Nebraska was so organized, and every coach and player knew exactly what his job and role was. I love the coaching staff, and I know I can become a better player and a better person at Nebraska."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Arizona State, BYU, Utah, Texas Tech and Washington State

PARENTS: Vaifoa and Toa Brown

Terrell Butler

Defensive Back

Austell, Ga.

(Pebblebrook)

Height: 5-11

Weight: 195

Speed: 4.4

DOB: April 25, 1982

TEAM'S 1999 RECORD: 6-4

OFFENSE/DEFENSE: Split backs (wingback)/4-3 (cornerback)

HONORS: fifth best defensive back in country and third best player overall out of Georgia (SuperPrep); fifth best defensive back in Southeast (PrepStar); first team all-conference, first team all-county on offense and as returner

OTHER SPORTS: Track (100 meters: 10.4, 200 meters: 21.7)

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS: Music, sports

CAPSULE: Butler has been a star on both sides of the ball at Pebblebrook, but he will settle in at cornerback at Nebraska. This past season, Butler caught 29 passes for 425 yards and five touchdowns. He also had two interceptions on defense and 21 tackles. He visited Nebraska Dec. 17 but didn't commit until two days before signing day.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH CHUCK STINES:

"Terrell is a tremendous talent that can do anything he wants on a football field. He is a great cover corner that can stick with a receiver all over the field. Terrell has great ability as a receiver as well, and I feel he could be fantastic on the offensive side of the ball, too."

FRANK SOLICH:

"Terrell has great speed, track speed, and that is what is needed to play cornerback for us. We put so much pressure on our cornerbacks to cover all over the field that our corners are required to have outstanding cover ability."

WHY TERRELL CHOSE NEBRASKA:

"I love the way Nebraska plays defense, and the way the Blackshirts are always coming after teams. Nebraska trusts its corners to pick up and cover all over the field, and I love that kind of pressure. Nebraska is one of the top football programs in the country, and that is not going to change. The coaching staff is too professional and too organized to not keep Nebraska at the top."

SELECTED NEBRASKA OVER: Took official visits to Boston College, Tulane and Nebraska. Also recruited by most of the Southeast Conference

PARENTS: Terry and Dorothy Butler

Thunder Collins

I-back

Los Angeles, Calif. (Manual Arts/East Los Angeles Junior College)

Height: 6-2

Weight: 200

Speed: 4.4

DOB: Sept. 17, 1979

TEAM'S 1999 RECORD: 3-7

OFFENSIVE/DEFENSIVE: Pro-I (tailback)

HONORS: 24th best junior college player in country (SuperPrep Magazine); top 75 best junior college players in country (PrepStar); top five junior college running backs in country (National Recruiting Advisor); high school All-American at Manual Arts High School.

OTHER SPORTS: High school basketball, track; 100 meters: 10.5, 200 meters: 21.6, 400 meters: 48.6, anchored 4X100 and 4X400 relays

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS: Dancing, video games

CAPSULE: Thunder redshirted this past season so he would have 3 years to play at Nebraska. As a freshman, he rushed for 1,548 yards and 23 touchdowns and had more than 600 yards receiving. At Manual Arts High School his senior year, Collins rushed for 1,100 yards and 10 touchdowns.

JUNIOR COLLEGE COACH RICH GAMBOA:

"He is a legitimate 4.4 speed back at 210 pounds. He's tough, plays injured, and he carried us offensively. We even changed our offense for him because early in the year, we were primarily a passing offense, but we switched when we realized what kind of runner Collins is. I don't think we will ever have another running back like Thunder. Nebraska is the perfect team to take advantage of Thunder's talents."

FRANK SOLICH:

"We only signed one I-back, and Thunder was the one we wanted. Thunder Collins will report in the fall even though he is a junior college player. He is an excellent I-back with very good speed. He's very tough. He had great hands coming out of the backfield. Thunder is a multi-dimensional player."

WHY THUNDER CHOSE NEBRASKA:

"Nebraska is a running program, and I thought it would be perfect for me. I was so impressed with their academic facilities. They treated me like I was Thunder Collins the student first, and that meant a lot to me. I feel I will become an academic success because of the support at Nebraska."

SELECTED NEBRASKA OVER: Wisconsin, Oregon, Auburn and Washington State.

PARENTS: Thunder Collins Sr. and Sonia Oden; stepfather: John Craig



Ira Cooper

Linebacker
Omaha, Neb.
(Westside)
Height: 6-2
Weight: 220
Speed: 4.6
DOB: Sept. 30,
1981

TEAM'S 1999 RECORD: 10-2 (Class A semifinals)

OFFENSE/DEFENSE: I-formation (tailback)/4-3 (outside linebacker)

HONORS: 45th best player in Midlands (SuperPrep); ninth best player in Midlands (PrepStar); first team Super-State (Lincoln Journal Star); All-Nebraska (Omaha World-Herald)

OTHER SPORTS: Track (two time 300 hurdles state champ: 37.6)

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS: Hanging around and talking with friends

CAPSULE: Cooper played through an assortment of injuries this past season, including a slipped disk, pulled groin and broken hand. A 4-year starter at both running back and linebacker, Cooper rushed for 1,578 yards as a junior and scored 18 touchdowns. Ira's father Harley was a national Golden Gloves boxing champion in 1964. His older brother Michael was a 1992 All-Nebraska linebacker at Westside and went on to play at Iowa State. Ira is the youngest of 15 children.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH LARRY MORRISSEY:

"It was amazing that Ira could even suit up for us this season. He had so many injuries that he was only a shell of himself in some games. However, he showed what he was made of by trying to play in every game. When healthy, Ira is a tremendous football player."

FRANK SOLICH:

"Ira Cooper is a very big, physical type of player. He did a great job as a running back, too. I think he has a lot of toughness to be able to play when hurt. He has the size to line up as a Mike backer and also as a Sam backer."

WHY IRA CHOSE NEBRASKA:

"Nebraska is the best choice when you consider everything about a college. They have the best academics, best athletic program, best support system and the best coaching staff in college football. It's also close to home, which is best for me."

SELECTED NEBRASKA OVER: Only considered Nebraska

Parents: Harley and Edie Cooper



Sandro DeAngelis

Kicker
Niagara Falls, Ont.
(St. Joseph Coll.)
Height: 5-9
Weight: 200
Speed: 4.6
DOB: May 1,
1981

TEAM'S 1999 RECORD: 10-0

OFFENSE/DEFENSE: Multiple (fullback)/4-4 (middle linebacker)

HONORS: eighth best player in New York (SuperPrep); No. 2 kicker in East (PrepStar); Western New York Player of the Year; No. 1 recruit in Canada (Bill Passel's Canadian Recruiters); first team All-League; first team All-State as kicker

OTHER SPORTS: None

HOBBIES AND INTEREST: Weight lifting, reading, music and family and friends

CAPSULE: This past season, DeAngelis missed five games with a sprained left ankle, but as a junior rushed for 1,817 yards and 22 touchdowns. He also hit on five field goals and 37 extra points. He set school records with 184 total points and a punt of 84 yards. As a senior, he hit four field goals and rushed for 700 yards and nine touchdowns in four games. He also had 118 tackles.

HIGH SCHOOL BOB O'CONNOR:

"Sandro is an outstanding player and person. He has been almost automatic for us on his field goals and extra points, and he routinely kicked the ball in the end zone. Sandro was our best running back as well, and if he can get a little bigger, I don't think there is any doubt that he could be an outstanding running back at Nebraska someday."

FRANK SOLICH:

"Sandro doesn't see himself just as a kicker. He doesn't have the size to play fullback here like he did in high school, so now he's talking us into playing wingback. What that does is allow either Sandro to play wingback, or it allows Josh Brown (current NU kicker) to play another position."

WHY SANDRO CHOSE NEBRASKA:

"When I was little, my brothers would be watching their game telling me that is where I was going to play college football. Watching them over the years has proven to me that Nebraska is the greatest football school in the country."

SELECTED NEBRASKA OVER: Only visited Nebraska, but was recruited by Penn State, Notre Dame, Florida State, North Carolina and Virginia

PARENTS: Joseph and Carmela DeAngelis



Mike Erickson

Offensive Line
Papillion, Neb.
(Papillion-LaVista)

Height: 6-4
Weight: 275
Speed: 5.08
DOB: May 8,
1982

TEAM'S 1999 RECORD: 9-1 (first round of play-offs)

OFFENSE/DEFENSE: I-formation (right tackle)/5-2 (defensive tackle)

HONORS: All-American, 30th best offensive lineman in country (SuperPrep); fourth best offensive lineman in Midlands (PrepStar); All-State Offensive Captain (Omaha World-Herald); first team All-State (Lincoln Journal Star)

HOBBIES AND INTEREST: Hanging out with friends, movies and weight lifting

CAPSULE: Mike is a 3-year starter at offensive tackle and guard and played some defensive end as a senior. He was outstanding on defense, with 92 tackles and two sacks, and he blocked two field goals. Erickson also caught one pass as a tight end. He can bench 350 pounds and squats 495. Erickson is following the footsteps of NU sophomore defensive tackle Jeremy Slechta, who also played his high school ball at Papillion-LaVista. Erickson played beside Slechta for two years.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH GENE SUHR:

"As you know, we have had some very good offensive linemen here at our school, and I can tell you that Mike is as good as some of our very best. Jeremy Slechta signed with Nebraska recently, and Mike compares with him, except he will play on the offense and Jeremy on defense. Mike has great strength and moves well."

FRANK SOLICH:

"Once again, we are talking about an offensive lineman that really fits the skills that we always look for in the offensive line here at Nebraska. He has great strength and quickness and is an excellent power blocker."

WHY MIKE CHOSE NEBRASKA:

"Nebraska is so close to home, and they have the best college football program in the country. Their coaches are solid, and they are outstanding people. The players are solid as well. I have always wanted to play at Nebraska since I was little."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Only considered Nebraska

PARENTS: Dave and Sue Erickson



Martin (M.J.) Flaum

Offensive Line
Denver, Colo.
(Northglenn)

Height: 6-4
Weight: 295
Speed: 4.95
DOB: June 3,
1982

TEAM'S 1999 RECORD: 9-1 (first round of playoffs)

OFFENSE/DEFENSE: I-formation (right tackle)/5-2 (defensive tackle)

HONORS: 18th best offensive lineman in country (National Recruiting Advisor); All-American, 29th best offensive lineman in country (SuperPrep); first team offense All-State selection (Rocky Mountain News, Denver Post)

OTHER SPORTS: Track (won state shot put title as junior: 56-3, discus: 172-10)

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS: Listening to music and reading

CAPSULE: Flaum is a 3-year starter at offensive tackle, who also played six quarters at nose guard. He averaged five pancake blocks a game. During those six quarters on defense, he came up with eight tackles and a sack. The Flaum family are good friends with Bill Kosch and his son Jesse, who both played for the Huskers.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH SCOTT GALLAS:

"M.J. is one of the best offensive linemen that I have ever been around at this level. He is an outstanding run and pass blocker. I believe he is pretty close on both. He moves well for a big man and really has been a dominant player for us this past year."

FRANK SOLICH:

"He is a power blocker, with good feet and quick instincts. We looked at him on film and realized he was just what we have always played with in the offensive line at Nebraska and had great success with."

WHY M.J. CHOSE NEBRASKA:

"Nebraska was unbelievably impressive. Everything was so outstanding with the facilities, coaches and players. I liked everything about the program and just felt that it is the model college football program in the country."

SELECTED NEBRASKA OVER: M.J. was recruited by Colorado, Washington, Notre Dame, Michigan and Colorado State, but he only visited Nebraska

PARENTS: Margaret and Martin Sr. Flaum

T.J. Hollowell

Linebacker
Copperas Cove,
Texas
Height: 6-1
Weight: 215
Speed: 4.5
DOB: April 8, 1981

TEAM'S 1999 RECORD: 9-2 (first round)
OFFENSE/DEFENSE: I-Pro (TE)/4-3 (inside line-backer)

HONORS: 42nd best player in Southwest (SuperPrep); 20th best linebacker in Midlands (PrepStar); Texas top-100 team; first team All-State linebacker (Texas Sportswriters); first team Super Conference Texas; first team All-District safety in 1997 and linebacker in 1998

OTHER SPORTS: Track (100 meters: 10.7, 4X100 (second leg)

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS: Listening to music, playing with his dog and chilling with friends

CAPSULE: Hollowell has grown from a free safety to a middle linebacker and hasn't lost any of his speed. Hollowell had a dominant senior season, with 159 tackles, 21 tackles for losses, three sacks, four fumbles forced and 2 fumbles caused. He is also very active in the Teen Involvement Program, working with young kids to improve their academic and personal skills.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH JACK WELCH:

"T.J. has always been able to run, and his speed has improved no matter how big he gets. At linebacker, he chases the ball with enthusiasm and always winds up near the ball, most of the time making the tackle. He's a find young man to work with and works well within the community."

FRANK SOLICH:

"T.J. Hollowell has tremendous speed and quickness. He's a guy that could line up at Sam or Will. We will probably try him out as a Sam backer. He's a physical type of linebacker at around 215 pounds. He can make plays sideline-to-sideline."

WHY T.J. CHOSE NEBRASKA:

"Many things played a part in my decision. Nebraska is a great program, and I fit in with what they are doing defensively. Nebraska was where I really wanted to play my college football. Coach Solich is a nice person and has a great track record at Nebraska."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Texas A&M, OU, Kentucky and Miami

PARENTS: Renee and Tom Hollowell

Lannie Hopkins

Linebacker
Rowlett, Texas
Height: 6-1
Weight: 195
Speed: 4.4
DOB: July 25, 1980

TEAM'S 1999 RECORD: 5-5

DEFENSE: 4-3 (weaksie linebacker)

CAPSULE: All-American, 18th best linebacker in country (SuperPrep); All-Southwest team, ninth best player in Texas (SuperPrep); All-Midlands, 21st best linebacker in area (PrepStar); district. MVP; second team all-state; Texas top-100

OTHER SPORTS: Track (leadoff leg for district champion sprint relay, 110 high hurdles, triple jump and high jump)

HOBBIES AND INTEREST: All sports, enjoying life with friends.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH TOMMY WATKINS:

"Lannie is a super kid. He worked hard in practice every day and is always working with a smile. He is loved by all his teammates, coaches and teachers in his school. We don't have another individual that is liked as much as Lannie. He is a great athlete, but he really is a better person. He has great quickness and is fantastic athlete. We didn't play him on offense, but he would have been our best offensive player if we did. He could have played several positions for us."

FRANK SOLICH:

"Lannie has tremendous speed and quickness. He is the smallest linebacker we have, but he's a physical player with great speed. He can run people down from behind. We think he will have a great career here. With Lannie's size and speed, we think we will line him up as a Will backer."

WHY LANNIE CHOSE NEBRASKA:

"When I took my visits, I compared every school against each other, and after I visited Nebraska, I just knew that no school could measure up. Nebraska has everything that a player could ask for in a program, and the atmosphere surrounding Nebraska football is fantastic. The academic support system is as good as it gets, and it just feels good to be a Nebraska football player."

LANNIE CHOSE NEBRASKA: Texas A&M, Oklahoma and Memphis

PARENTS: Lannie and Dorothy Hopkins



Steve Kriewald
Fullback
Scotia, Neb.
(N. Loup-Scotia)
Height: 6-0
Weight: 242
Speed: 4.65
DOB: Sept. 4,
1981

TEAM'S 1999 RECORD: 6-4

OFFENSE/DEFENSE: running back/linebacker

HONORS: 31st best running back in Midlands (PrepStar); All-Nebraska defensive team, defensive captain 8-man D-2 team (Omaha World-Herald); Class D-2 Player of the Year (Lincoln Journal Star); one of 21 finalists for Wendy's Nebraska Heisman Award

OTHER SPORTS: Basketball (starter averaging 12 points and 13 rebounds per game); track (All-Class champion in shot put: 61-7, fourth in Class D discus: 159-0)

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS: Construction work

CAPSULE: Kriewald is only the fourth eight-man player to earn a scholarship from Nebraska, joining Terry Connealy, Lance Lundberg and Dean Steinkuhler. A 4-year starter, he rushed for 1,175 yards as a senior and scored 15 touchdowns. He also caught 11 passes for 84 yards. On defense, he had 75 solo stops, 94 assists, one sack and 12 tackles for losses. Kriewald also plans to throw the shot and discus for the Nebraska track team.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH TROY UNZICKER:

"It has been a privilege to coach Steve, and we are definitely going to miss him. He did just about everything for us and led us on both sides of the ball. I believe Nebraska wants to play him at fullback, and they have had some great athletes at that position over the years."

COACH FRANK SOLICH:

"Steve will fit the mold of some of the great fullbacks we've had at Nebraska. As you look at him at 5-11, 200 pounds, he has excellent speed. He has great toughness and great maneuverability from the fullback spot. He will be a great blocker and a runner for us."

WHY KRIEWALD CHOSE NEBRASKA:

"Nebraska is where I have always wanted to go. It's an honor to be asked to play at Nebraska and a great privilege to stay in-state. To get a scholarship from Nebraska is a dream come true."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Only considered Nebraska

PARENTS: Gordon and Phyllis Kriewald



DeWayne Long Jr.
Wide Receiver
West Des Moines,
Iowa (Dowling)
Height: 6-2
Weight: 205
Speed: 4.49
DOB: Sept. 11,
1981

TEAM'S 1998 RECORD: 10-2 (first round of playoffs)

OFFENSE: Wing-T (fullback)

HONORS: 46th best player in Midlands (SuperPrep); first team all-conference, sophomore and junior; Gridiron Elite squad (SuperPrep).

OTHER SPORTS: Track (100 meters: 10.8, 200 meters: 22.8, 4X100 anchor); basketball (2-year starter, averaging 18 points per game); baseball (left fielder, hitting .385 with 14 HR)

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS: Horseback riding

CAPSULE: A torn ACL destroyed Long's senior year as he played in only one game. His rehab is way ahead of schedule. For his career, Long rushed for 1,500 yards and 22 TDs. Long could dunk a basketball in the eighth grade and has a 34-inch vertical jump. Long will play wingback for the Huskers and wants to be play baseball as well.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH MATT DILLON:

"DeWayne is one of the best all-around athletes that we have ever had here at Dowling. It's unfortunate that he has gone through so many injuries with our football team. He hurt an ankle that cost him a couple of games last year and of course tore his knee up this year. Don't worry though because nobody works harder than DeWayne, and he will come back better than ever. He is a power back with excellent speed. I think Nebraska wants to play him at wingback, and he will be very good there. He can play a number of positions for them."

FRANK SOLICH:

"DeWayne Long is a guy that played on both sides of the ball. He could play in the secondary for us, but he is a very good offensive player, and we feel he will be a great wingback for us."

WHY DEWAYNE CHOSE NEBRASKA:

"I was just so impressed with Nebraska when I attended their summer football camp. The Nebraska coaches are very organized and professional in everything they do. They have tremendous support for their athletes."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Notre Dame

PARENTS: DeWayne Sr. and Lesa Long

Alvin Marshall

Wide Receiver
Los Angeles, Calif.
(Locke)
Height: 5-11
Weight: 180
Speed: 4.4
DOB: July 31, 1981

OFFENSE/DEFENSE: One-back (wide receiver)
HONORS: No. 10 running back in West (PrepStar Magazine); first team All-Area, All-Metro, All-Conference as running back

OTHER SPORTS: Track (100 meters: 10.6)

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS: Sports and working out

CAPSULE: Marshall has been a dominant running back in high school, but he will move to wide receiver at Nebraska. This past season, Marshall rushed for 1,128 yards and 20 touchdowns. He goes by the nickname of Randy.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH E.C. ROBINSON:

"Alvin is a game-breaker on the field with his blazing speed and ability to make people miss. He's not real big, but he can make any defender miss. I think Nebraska will use him like they use Bobby Newcombe."

FRANK SOLICH:

"Alvin Marshall is a late addition. He goes by Randy. He is a player that played as a running back and receiver. We will line him up at receiver. He is a very talented and gifted young man. He has great hands and tremendous balance. We think he has a great chance to become a great player at receiver."

SELECTED NEBRASKA OVER: Oregon and Colorado

PARENTS: Marcus and Cynthia Taylor



Lornell McPherson

Defensive Back
Omaha, Neb.
(Central)
Height: 5-10
Weight: 175
Speed: 4.5
DOB: June 24, 1981

TEAM'S 1999 RECORD: 7-4 (Class A quarter-finals)

OFFENSE/DEFENSE: Pro-I (tailback); 4-3 (cornerback)

HONORS: Honorable mention All-American (USA Today); 12th best defensive back in Midlands (PrepStar); Super-State (Lincoln Journal Star and All-Nebraska first team as running back (Omaha World-Herald)

OTHER SPORTS: Track (member of state's all-time fastest 400-meter relay team)

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS: Sports and hanging out with friends

CAPSULE: McPherson is regarded as one of the most fluid athletes in the Big 12. McPherson is a two-way star playing the slot and cornerback this past year. He finished with 31 catches and six interceptions. McPherson has a 39-inch vertical jump.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH JOE McMENAMIN:

"Lornell is a great athlete that went from being an outstanding option quarterback to a wide receiver, so that he could get prepared for the next level. He has great skills, can catch anything that he gets his hands on, and he is one of the best cover guys I have every seen at this level."

FRANK SOLICH:

"Lornell is a player that we had in our camp. He has great speed and quickness. We believe that he is capable of latching onto wide receivers with his speed. This is necessary in the Big 12. So, Lornell can give us the kind of play on the corners that is necessary in order to continue to play the type of coverage that we play."

WHY LORNELL CHOSE NEBRASKA:

"I wanted to play somewhere in the Big 12, and Nebraska is the best school for me. I thought about leaving the area but then realized that Nebraska is such a good program that it didn't make any sense for me to go elsewhere."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Michigan, Iowa, Kansas, Kansas State and Colorado State

PARENTS: John and Lula McPherson



Ross Pilkington

Wide Receiver
Fort Collins, Colo.
(Loveland)
Height: 6-1
Weight: 185
Speed: 4.5
DOB: July 21,
1981

TEAM'S 1999 RECORD: 7-3

OFFENSE/DEFENSE: Split option (wide Receiver)/4-3 (free safety)

HONORS: First team all-state wide receiver; first team all-league wide receiver; honorable mention All-American (USA Today); 39th best player in Midlands Region (SuperPrep); 21st best wide receiver in Midlands (PrepStar)

OTHER SPORTS: Baseball (4-year starting shortstop, hit .645 with 7 homers this past season)

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS: Hunting, fishing

CAPSULE: Ross tore his ACL during the seventh game, but his rehab is ahead of schedule. For his career, he had 2,500 yards in returns and receiving and scored 25 touchdowns. He averaged more than 30 yards per catch. He is a former teammate of 1999 recruit Josh Davis. Ross also wants to play baseball at Nebraska and has excellent credentials, earning first team all-state honors at shortstop for the past three years.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH JOHN POOVEY:

"Ross as a player did many things for us. He has great speed, blocks well and is a great receiver and return man. Ross is blessed with great hands, and he can turn a short gain into a great play. He was timed at 4.49 in the 40-yard dash and is a great all-around athlete on top of that."

FRANK SOLICH:

"Ross Pilkington is a player that we have known about for some time. He gave us an early commitment and stuck with it. We think he can be a great receiver and a great blocker, which is very important to us from that position."

WHY ROSS CHOSE NEBRASKA:

"Nebraska has a great winning tradition, and they are going to let me play both football and baseball. I just felt that I fit in at Nebraska. They run the same type of offense that I have been playing in high school. Josh Davis signed with Nebraska last year and is a great friend of mine."

SELECTED NEBRASKA OVER:

Only visited Nebraska but considered Colorado State, Colorado, Oregon and Arizona State

PARENTS: Jacque and Gary Pilkington



Nick Povendo

Offensive Line
Keller, Texas
Height: 6-5
Weight: 305
Speed: 4.9
DOB: Jan. 9,
1981

TEAM'S 1999 RECORD: 4-5

OFFENSE/DEFENSE: Multiple two-back: (right guard)

HONORS: All-American, 12th best offensive lineman in country (SuperPrep); 15th best offensive lineman in Midlands (PrepStar); Texas top-100; Texas Super-State first team; No. 2 offensive lineman in Texas (Dave Campbell recruiting service)

OTHER SPORTS: Powerlifting: (No. 1 powerlifter in Texas with a 1,380 total)

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS: Hunting and watching football on television

CAPSULE: Nick is a 3-year starter who went both ways as a sophomore and junior but settled in at right guard for his senior year. He is one of the strongest players in Texas with a 355 bench, 600 pound deadlift and 515 squat. Yet, he may be one of the quickest offensive linemen in Texas with a 4.9 clocking in the 40-yard dash.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH KEN MIZEL:

"I spent 10 years as the defensive coordinator at Nevada Reno and played with and coached several players that played in the NFL. Nick is by far better than those players. He compares very favorably with Derrick Kennard and Eric Saunders, guys that I have coached that are now playing the NFL."

FRANK SOLICH:

"There aren't a lot of big men who are as good an athlete as Nick. He can run very well for a big man his size and is one of the strongest players in Texas."

WHY NICK CHOSE NEBRASKA:

"My visit to Nebraska was an experience of a lifetime. The tradition at Nebraska is incredible. The players that have played there are so impressive. Not only are they great athletes, it seems every single player is an academic All-American. That just blew me away. It's the most complete program in the country, and I get to be a part of it."

SELECTED NEBRASKA OVER: Povendo had scholarship offers from Tennessee, Purdue, Syracuse, TCU, SMU, Texas Tech and Baylor

PARENTS: Mike and Kay Povendo



Jason Richenberger

Linebacker
Liberty, Mo.
Height: 6-1
Weight: 200
Speed: 4.5
DOB: May 6, 1982

TEAM'S 1999 RECORD: 12-2 (state quarterfinals)

OFFENSE/DEFENSE: 4-3 (weaksides linebacker)

HONORS: All-American, No. 3 linebacker in country (SuperPrep); No. 7 linebacker in Midlands (PrepStar); Kansas City Metro Defensive Player of the Year; first team All-State, All-District and All-Conference linebacker

OTHER SPORTS: Track (finished sixth in 100 meters: 10.6, 200 meters: 21.9)

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS: Hunting, fishing

CAPSULE: Richenberger was Nebraska's second oral commitment back in May. He really made a name for himself at three NIKE camps, where he was timed at 4.53 in the 40-yard dash and posted a 34-inch vertical jump. This past season, he had 30 solo tackles, 80 assists, 11 sacks, 3 interceptions (returned two for touchdowns), two forced fumbles and eight tackles for losses. Richenberger played in only five games as a junior because of a virus but still recorded 80 tackles.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH DAN ANDERSON:

"Jason has all the tools you look for in an athlete. He has size, speed, intelligence and the desire to succeed. We played him on the weakside at linebacker, and teams just couldn't block him. Jason has a great opportunity at Nebraska, and he will fit in with their scheme very well."

FRANK SOLICH:

"Jason Richenberger is someone that many consider one of the top linebackers in the country. He has great track speed. He's a guy who is able to run people down. As you know, we do blitz on occasion, and Jason should be outstanding at rushing the quarterback."

WHY JASON CHOSE NEBRASKA:

"I really like the coaches' approach and how they go about their business. The football facilities are awesome, and the support of the fans is fantastic. The coaches were very unassuming. They never tried to pressure me in any way."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Only considered Nebraska

PARENTS: Randy and Becky Richenberger



Chris Septak

Tight End
Omaha, Neb.
(Millard West)
Height: 6-4
Weight: 245
Speed: 4.7
DOB: Oct. 15, 1981

TEAM'S 1999 RECORD: 10-3 (Class A state runner-up)

OFFENSE/DEFENSE: (Tight end)/(defensive line)

HONORS: All-American, No. 9 tight end in country (SuperPrep); All-American, No. 5 tight end in country (PrepStar); All-American (Rivals100.com); top player in Nebraska (FirstDown Publications); Defensive Player of the Year (Lincoln Journal Star); All-Nebraska (Omaha World-Herald); Gatorade Circle of Champions Nebraska Player of the Year.

OTHER SPORTS: Basketball; track (discus)

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS: Sports

COACH DAN McLAUGHLIN:

"Chris is a dominant football player that was great for us on both sides of the ball. We didn't throw the ball much, so Chris didn't get much of an opportunity to catch the ball and build some stats. However, he was just as good for us on defense and really controlled the game for us on the defensive side of the ball. He has a great work ethic, comes from a super family and has all the potential that you could ask for in a young man and in a football player."

FRANK SOLICH:

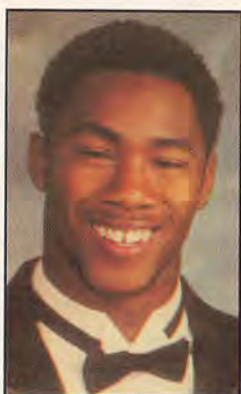
"Chris is a commitment we've had for a long time. He is recognized around the country as one of the best. There's not a question that he could play on either side of the ball, but he will play tight end for us."

WHY CHRIS CHOSE NEBRASKA:

"The atmosphere at Nebraska is what I was looking for. It was really no contest, and I have known that I was going to Nebraska for some time. Their academic program is outstanding, and the football program speaks for itself. It's the best program in the nation."

CHOSE NEBRASKA OVER: Only considered Nebraska

PARENTS: Larry and Debra Septak



Bernard Thomas

Rush End
Mount. View, Calif.
(St. Francis)
Height: 6-4
Weight: 235
Speed: 4.7
DOB: April 10,
1981

TEAM'S 1999 RECORD: 10-2

OFFENSE/DEFENSE: Split back (fullback)/5-2 (ILB, WDT and DE)

HONORS: All-American, 22nd best defensive lineman in country, 18th best player Far West (SuperPrep); first team All-League linebacker

OTHER SPORTS: Track (110 high hurdles: 14.9)

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS: Clay sculpting and oil painting

CAPSULE: Thomas was recruited to play rush end. This past season, Thomas finished with eight sacks and 96 tackles. He also rushed for 430 yards as a fullback. Thomas was so dominant that teams constantly ran away from him.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH MIKE MITCHELL:

"Thomas has been a great young man to be around. He is a dominant player, so much so that teams never tried to test him. We had to think of ways to try to hide him from the defense. He is a big man who can really run, which makes him a great pass rusher. Bernard is very good at running down running backs and quarterbacks and because of his speed and strength is never out of a play."

FRANK SOLICH:

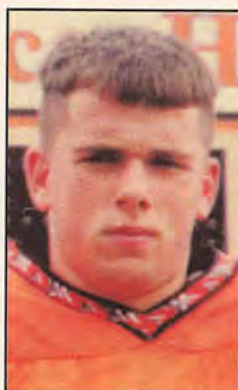
"Bernard Thomas was a player that came through our football camp, so we got the chance to work with him first hand. He is a guy who has played a number of positions. He played fullback, rush end and linebacker. He can play with his hand down but also has the great quickness and ability to recover and make a play."

WHY BERNARD CHOSE NEBRASKA:

"Nebraska coaches were more interested in me as a person than all the other schools combined. People in Nebraska were all laid back, and that is my style. I clicked well with the team, and that was important to me. I want to be a champion, and Nebraska is the place to go for the best college football in the country."

SELECTED NEBRASKA OVER: USC, Michigan and Notre Dame

PARENTS: Valerie Robinson, Jackey Wilson and Lecia Wilson



Ben Zajicek

Wide Receiver
Beatrice, Neb.
Height: 6-0
Weight: 205
Speed: 4.4
DOB: May 14,
1981

TEAM'S 1999 RECORD: 5-4

OFFENSE/DEFENSE: I-formation (tailback)/4-3 (free safety and cornerback)

HONORS: 54th best player in Midlands (SuperPrep); honorable mention Class B All-State offense (Lincoln Journal Star, Omaha World-Herald)

OTHER SPORTS: Track (100 meters: 10.47, 200 meters: 22.0; 4X400, 4X100 relays)

HOBBIES AND INTERESTS: Physical fitness

CAPSULE: Ben is a 3-year starter at tailback and free safety. This past season, a shoulder injury cost him four games, but he still rushed for 777 yards and was the second leading tackler. He was one of the key reasons Beatrice posted its first winning season in five years. Very strong for his size, Zajicek can bench 330 pounds, squat 510 and has a best of 365 in the power clean.

HIGH SCHOOL COACH DALLAS JENSEN:

"Ben is an extremely hard worker, excellent in everything that he tries. He has very good speed and size. Ben is a dedicated weightlifter, and I think he will do very well at Nebraska. He has been a good role model for our younger kids."

FRANK SOLICH:

"Ben is another guy that fits our program very well. If you look at tapes, you really become impressed with his athletic ability. He is a great running back. We had him in camp and got the chance to see him at receiver, and that's where we will line him up. I don't think any one has better work habits than Ben."

WHY BEN CHOSE NEBRASKA:

"It's a great program, one of the greatest in college football. The atmosphere at Nebraska is incredible, and each player, coach and fan just revels in it. They all get along so well. It's a true family atmosphere. Signing with Nebraska is a childhood dream of ours. Every kid in Nebraska grows up wanting to play for Nebraska. The coaches are very nurturing and care about each player on the roster. The coaches get to know each individual player because they realize each player needs to be coached differently."

SELECTED NEBRASKA OVER: Iowa State

PARENTS: Jeff and Terri Zajicek

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RECRUITING WRAPUP

Starting Early

Nebraska's summer football camps once again pay dividends in recruiting process

By James Hale

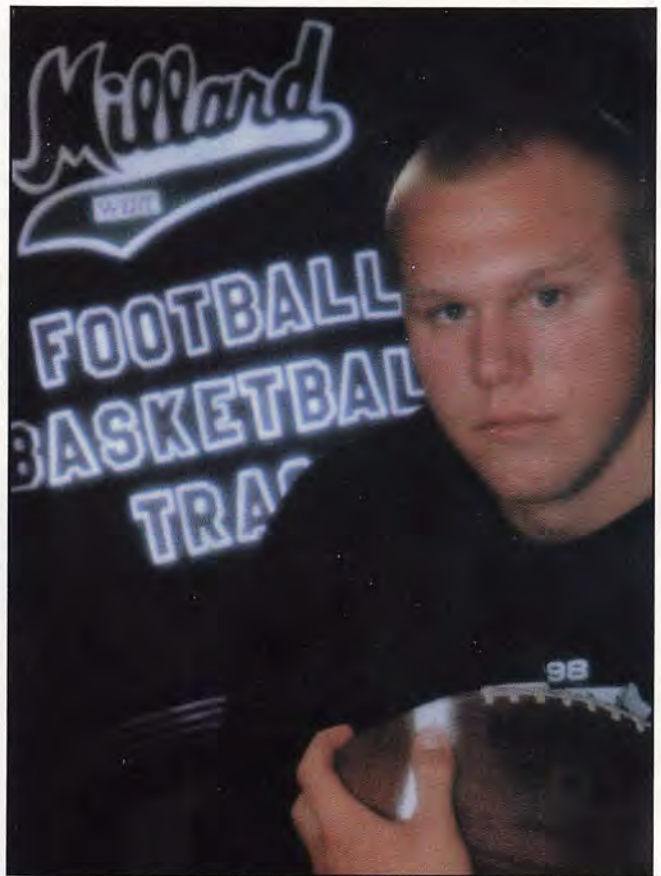
It's a demonstration of just how good Nebraska football really is when it can put together a class ranked in the top two in the conference and in the top 12 in the country, yet still be disappointed in the end.

Nebraska signs a class that so many programs across the country would trade for, yet there is a touch of sadness about two players who got away on signing day. Such is life for the elite program in college football, that it can sign a class that will keep it battling for national championships for years to come, but the fans are left to wonder why two national players would even consider playing elsewhere.

The Cornhuskers were once again a recruiting machine, sizing up their prospects, and earning oral commitments early and often. However, this season, the Huskers had some excitement right up to signing day, as down the stretch the Nebraska would go two-for-four on national recruits who would draw a lot of attention.

When all was said and done, the Huskers signed 20 high school athletes and one very important junior college transfer. Once again, the Huskers went all over the country to sign their class, hauling in six players from Nebraska, four from Texas, three from Colorado and California, and one each from Georgia, Iowa, Missouri and Utah. To show that the Huskers hold no boundaries to where they will find a player, they also kept their Canadian pipeline going.

As is custom, Nebraska got off to a flying start just after signing day in 1999, when tight end Chris Septak of Omaha (Millard West), Neb., committed in late February. Septak confirmed that commitment after attending the Nebraska summer camp. The summer camp would once



Tight end Chris Septak became the first member of the 2000 recruiting class, when he committed last February.

again pay huge dividends, with more than 70 percent of the recruiting class participating.

Septak was one who couldn't wait to commit to the Huskers after seeing their program up close.

"I knew a great deal about the program anyway, but their camp is so professional," Septak said. "The coaches treat every player, no matter how good they are, as if they are the most important player out there. That was what really impressed me. They worked with guys who are



Millard West's Chris Septak had just 12 catches for 200 yards last season, but his all-around play made him one of the top tight end recruits in the country.

never going to play college football the same way they work with those of us who are going to.

"I felt if they would take time to coach that way, then they would be tremendous with those of us who would sign with them."

The Cornhuskers couldn't have gotten off to a better start. Septak was rated as the preseason No. 2 tight end in the country. Fall practice hadn't even started, and Nebraska had an All-American in the bank.

In early May, Nebraska made it two top-50 national players in a row, when linebacker Jason Richenberger of Liberty, Mo., committed. Richenberger became a star at three Nike camps in the summer with consistent times of 4.53 in the 40-yard dash and a 34-inch vertical jump. He was just as good at the Nebraska camp.

"I have always loved the Nebraska program, and the camp gave me the opportunity to see the program up close," Richenberger said. "I went into the camps in great shape, and I was happy things went as well as they did."

It didn't take long for the Huskers to pick up their third commitment, as Steve Kriewald of North Loup-Scotia High School in Nebraska got a chance to fulfill his dream.

"It has always been a dream of mine to play at Nebraska. It's every kid's dream in Nebraska," Kriewald said. "I have gone to their camp two straight years, and I was so glad that I impressed them enough to offer me a scholarship."

The Cornhusker coaching staff once again showed its ability to evaluate players from all walks of life and all situations. Kriewald is an eight-man football star and is believed to be only the fourth eight-man player to sign a letter with the Huskers.

It wasn't even July, and already the Huskers had three

commitments, and the word was out they were recruiting several members of the top 100 players in the country.

At running back, Nebraska was very much in the running for Tatum Bell of DeSoto, Texas, Tyrell Dortch of Hoboken, N.J., Derrick Arnold of Houston (Milby), Texas, and Albert Hollis of Sacramento (Christian Brothers), Calif. Thunder Collins of East Los Angeles College was rated as one of the top junior college running backs in the country, and he was already leaning to Nebraska.

It was a great year for offensive linemen in Colorado, and the Huskers had their sights on all of them. Jake Andersen of Denver (Mullen) and M.J. Flaum of Denver (Northglenn) were ranked by many as top-100 national linemen. The entire nation wanted both players, but the Huskers felt they had an edge.

All-American Wes Sims of Weatherford, Okla., was taking an early interest, but he was also interested in Texas and Oklahoma. Nebraska also took an early lead on All-America defensive tackle Jammal Brown of Lawton (MacArthur), Okla., but understood the Sooners would be tough to beat with their new coaching staff. Manaia Brown of West Valley Granter, Utah, also could have his pick of schools, and Nebraska was in the hunt.

Out West, the Huskers were battling Texas, Georgia and Notre Dame for slick receivers Albert Hollis of Sacramento and Alvin Marshall of Los Angeles (Locke). Defensive tackle Calvin Barrett of Spring Valley and Vince Feula of LaMirada were also planning visits early. All-America defensive end Bernard Thomas of Mountain View (Saint Francis) already had the Cornhuskers in this top three.

Nebraska has never been afraid to sign an athlete who has unique talents, which is why place-kicker/running

back Sandro DeAngelis of Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada, committed to the Huskers in early June. Think about how many place-kickers are good enough to sign as a combination fullback as well. DeAngelis is the third Canada native to sign with the Huskers in the last three years, following Dahrran Diedrick and Patrick Kabongo.

"There is no question that in Canada, Nebraska is becoming one of, if not the most popular team," DeAngelis said. "The last three years, Nebraska has signed the top player out of Canada, and that doesn't go unnoticed."

Nebraska always works the state of Colorado very hard, and this year wasn't going to be an exception. The Huskers had eyed three super athletes, and the first to fall to Nebraska was Ross Pilkington of Loveland in late June.

"I just loved Nebraska's offense and how they are opening up the offense more and more," Pilkington said. "I realize that Nebraska will always be a running offense, but as they open it up little by little, I want to be a part of that, to take advantage of that great running game."

It was in the cards for Pilkington to be a Husker. His father, Greg, played for Nebraska back in the early 1970s, and one of Ross's best friends is Josh Davis, who is a former teammate. Davis redshirted this past season at Nebraska.

The Huskers were on a roll, and it was because of their summer football camps. It seemed every athlete who attended the camp wanted to become a Cornhusker. The Nebraska coaching staff was getting a great opportunity to work with some of the top players in the country.

Wide receiver DeWayne Long of West Des Moines (Dowling), Iowa, was rated as one of the top three players in Iowa and had earned preseason All-America honors. He went to the Husker football camp and broke the rare 2,000-point plateau in the Performance Index. Those numbers were too good to pass up and the Husker offer during camp was just what Long wanted to hear.

Long would find out just how much Nebraska believed in his abilities when he suffered a torn ACL knee injury during practice right after the first game of the season.

"When I was first injured, I was really worried that Nebraska wouldn't want me anymore," Long said. "However, as soon as I called them with the bad news, they immediately told me that they would stand by their scholarship offer. They have encouraged me throughout my rehab process, and I am way ahead of schedule. Nebraska is a class program, and they certainly proved that with me."

Another oral commitment out of the summer football camps came from All-America linebacker Ira Cooper of Omaha Westside. Cooper was a household name after his spectacular junior season and was rated high on the Husker recruiting board. Despite offers from some of the top football programs in the country, Cooper had Nebraska high on his list as well.

"It was great to hear from all those other schools, but there is no need for a Nebraska kid to go anywhere else when a great program like Nebraska is right in this state," Cooper said. "I knew where I was going before I got to their camp."

Two talented offensive linemen also made decisions in June to play for the Huskers, when Mike Erickson of Omaha (Papillion-LaVista) and Josh Plisch of Rothschild, Wisc., accepted NU offers.

Two years ago, Erickson played alongside 1998 Papillion-LaVista graduate Jeremy Slechta, who now plays defensive tackle for the Huskers. That experience



As a receiver and return specialist, Ross Pilkington of Fort Collins, Colo., averaged more than 30 yards a touch.

was part of the reason why Erickson chose Nebraska.

"I knew from the beginning that I was going to follow Jeremy to Nebraska," Erickson said. "It has always been a dream of mine to play at Nebraska."

Defensive back was a top priority going into the recruiting year, and Nebraska got a commitment from one of the best in the country, right out of its own backyard in late August.

Lornell McPherson of Omaha (Central) thought about taking visits to Michigan, Iowa, Kansas State or maybe Colorado State, but once Nebraska offered after he attended their summer camp, he decided he didn't need to look anywhere else.

"The camp showed me everything that I needed to know about a football program," said McPherson, who played quarterback and defensive back for the Eagles. "I just knew there wasn't a better program out there than Nebraska."

McPherson's teammate Ja'Maine Billups was also considering Nebraska. The only problem was that Billups wanted to play running back, and Nebraska wanted him to be a defensive back. Billups was getting looks from Iowa State and Michigan, with the Cyclones the only school recruiting him as a running back.

Nebraska's goal was to sign an entire offensive line

with this class. By late August, Martin Flaum of Denver (Northglenn) joined Plisch and Erickson. Flaum didn't attend Nebraska's summer camp and went to Colorado's instead. In fact, after his junior season, Flaum committed to Colorado, but changed his mind when Rick Neuheisel left CU for Washington after the 1998 season.

By the time the Huskers played their 1999 opener, they already had more than half of their class committed.

Nebraska would make it a clean sweep of players it wanted out of Colorado, when offensive lineman Jake Andersen of Denver (Mullen) gave the word in December. Andersen had offers from USC and Colorado but only visited Nebraska.

"Nebraska is a great fit for me," Andersen said. "Their fan support is second to none."

It was about that time however, that the Huskers lost Plisch to Minnesota. Distance was the major reason why Plisch made the switch. However, it didn't take long for Nebraska to get an offensive lineman back. Nick Povendo of Keller, Texas, was rated as one of the top five offensive linemen in Texas. After considering several schools nationally, he chose Nebraska.

A top priority for the 2000 class was to find a big-time tailback, and Thunder Collins of East Los Angeles Junior College was just the guy. Despite playing on a 3-7 team his freshman season, Collins rushed for 1,548 yards and 23 touchdowns, before redshirting this past season to preserve three years of eligibility.

"Nebraska is the perfect place for me," Collins said. "They way they run the tailback is just what I am looking for. They need a playmaker like me at tailback, and I can't wait to be that kind of player for them."

Thomas was the next to commit, and it was a bit of a surprise. The all-star defensive end said back in November that he was going to take five visits, but after visiting Nebraska, he said he didn't feel there was any reason to look around.

The Cornhuskers cleaned up on two talented Texas linebackers to close out their December recruiting. Nebraska out-recruited Big 12 rivals Oklahoma and Texas A&M for both Lannie Hopkins of Rowlett, and T.J. Hollowell of Copperas Cove.

The Huskers are always very selective with quarterbacks. In mid-December, it appeared that Nebraska had its eyes on three outstanding prospects. However, quickly Chris Kelly of Germantown, Md., decided to go with Maryland, and Corey Webster of St. James, La., went to Southern Mississippi.

That would leave one of the most athletic quarterbacks in the country on the Husker list. Carlyle Holiday of San Antonio (Roosevelt), Texas, was a 4.5 sprinter with a cannon for an arm. He seemed tailor-made for the Nebraska offense, but Texas A&M and Notre Dame seemed to think his talents fit their offenses as well. At the start of January, Holiday wasn't sure where he was going, and he would take his decision down to the wire.

Holiday took his visit to Nebraska in January. All-American free safety Adrian Mayes of Houston (Forrest Brook), Texas, would take his visit to Lincoln on Jan. 14. Also cornerback Terrell Butler of Pebblebrook (Austell), Ga., and Marshall continued to move up the priority list. Nebraska needed to reload at cornerback, and Marshall was just too good of a skill player to pass up. Heading down the stretch, Nebraska already appeared to be over its limit of available scholarships, however, the Huskers had such good players still on the board, that they wanted to stay in the chase.

Of course, Nebraska didn't get them all. Sims and



As a junior, Omaha Westside's Ira Cooper rushed for 1,578 yards and 18 touchdowns. He will play linebacker at Nebraska.

Brown both stayed home and went to Oklahoma. Bell surprised many and signed with Oklahoma State, Hollis went to Georgia, Arnold to Arizona State, and the nation's top defensive tackle, Albert Means of Memphis (Trezevant), Tenn., looked at Nebraska but went to Alabama.

Butler and Mayes committed in mid-December, but both soon wavered and became soft commitments. Butler was still considering Georgia, while Mayes was still going to visit LSU in late December.

Holiday had narrowed his choices down to Nebraska and Notre Dame, and this looked like a sure bet for Nebraska. The Irish had already committed three quarterbacks, while Nebraska was in dire need of depth at quarterback and only looking at Holiday.

Nebraska came up big in late December with the commitment of defensive back Willie Amos of Sweetwater, Texas, and defensive tackle Manaia Brown of Granger, Utah. No big-time programs recruits areas like Granger, Utah, like Nebraska, and this kind of detective work pays off.

Nebraska lost only one in-state athlete, and that was Billups, who shocked the world and committed to Iowa State. The fact he was going to be a running back for the Cyclones led him to Ames.

Now, it was down to four outstanding prospects, and the Huskers would get half of them. Butler stayed with his original commitment and turned down Georgia. Marshall was a tailback in high school but will move to wide receiver at Nebraska.

However, Mayes started showing signs he was turning to LSU a week before signing day, and when he had the papers in front of him, he decided to play his college football in Baton Rouge.

Holiday would break the heart of the Huskers and had them shaking their heads at the same time. Holiday decided to play for the Golden Domers despite the fact he was the fourth quarterback they signed.

The Huskers signed 21 athletes for their 2000 class despite appearing to have only 17 scholarships to give. They missed out on a quarterback but signed a class that is ranked second in the Big 12 and as high as seventh in one listing. It's a typical Nebraska class loaded with speed at all positions, great skill players on offense and athletic big men on defense. ■

Banner Year for Big 12

*Longhorns, Huskers, Sooners
land top classes in conference*

By James Hale

The results are in, and once again, the Big 12 Conference was one of the most dominating football recruiting conferences in the country.

As many as four teams dot the nation's top-20 rankings. As a whole, the conference pulled in some of the elite players in the country.

Here is a rundown of each team, where they rank in the conference and the top players in their class.

South Grand Prairie, Roy Williams of Odessa (Permian) and Sloan Thomas of Klein are the three top receivers in Texas and three of the top ten in the country. The Longhorns signed an all-star at every position.

rated as one of the top 50 players in the country.



3. OKLAHOMA

Bob Stoops has already reversed the fortunes of the once mighty Sooners, signing OU's highest-rated class in years. The Sooners are ranked as high as ninth in one service and 19th in another. Parade All-American offensive lineman Wes Sims of Weatherford, Okla., leads the class along with All-American defensive tackle Jammal Brown of Lawton (MacArthur), Okla. Out of Texas, the Sooners are proud to have Texas top-50 talents Darren Stephens of Lewisville at free safety and outside linebacker Jimmy Wilkerson of Omaha (Paul Pewitt).

4. COLORADO

Nebraska was a thorn in Buffaloes' side, but they managed to sign enough prime-time players to land in the national top 20. Despite losing three of the top seven players in Colorado to



2. NEBRASKA

The Cornhuskers once again pulled in a balanced class that is ranked as high as fourth in one service and as low as 14th in another. For the second straight year, the Huskers landed one of the top offensive line classes in the country, headed by Mike Erickson of Papillion-LaVista and Jake Anderson of Denver (Mullen). Talented junior college tailback Thunder Collins is also a part of the class. Linebacker Jason Richenberger of Liberty, Mo., is



1. TEXAS

Mack Brown continues to prove he is a master recruiter, signing a class ranked in the top five in the country. The Longhorns needed to replace their wide receiver corps and did so in a big way, signing three of the top pass catchers in the country. B.J. Johnson of



the Huskers, the Buffaloes struck gold with Marcus Houston of Denver (Jefferson), the nation's No. 2-rated running back. Quarterbacks Craig Ochs of Boulder (Fairview), Colo., and Bob Pesavento of Fort Scott (Kan.) C.C., are both highly regarded. Outside linebacker Sean Tufts of Englewood (Cherry Creek), Colo., is a preseason All-American who is recovering from ACL surgery.



Benford of Blinn (Texas) J.C., wide receiver Roger Ross of Garden City and linebacker Columbus Wooley of Blinn. The top prep prospect to sign with the Jayhawks is defensive tackle Travis Watkins of Derby, Kan.

8. KANSAS STATE

It seems the Wildcats are never ranked very high in recruiting but always put a great product on the field. The Wildcats signed a prime-time tailback type in Josh Scobey of Northeastern (Okla.) A&M Junior College. Chris Boggas of Irving, Texas, is one of the top five offensive linemen in the country. Cornerback DeMarcus Faggins of Navarro (Texas) J.C., is highly thought of, as is tight end Jon Doty of West Des Moines (Dowling), Iowa.

9. IOWA STATE

The Cyclones pulled one of the biggest shockers in the Big 12 recruiting race, when JaMaine Billups of Omaha (Central), Neb., shocked the Huskers and signed with ISU. Billups is an excellent athlete, who signed with the Cyclones because they promised him he could play running back. Linebacker Tyson Smith of West Des Moines (Dowling), Iowa, chose ISU over Iowa. Offensive lineman Kerry Carlson of Rochester (Minn.) Community College should help immediately.

10. MISSOURI

The Tigers lost most of the top talent in Missouri but did salvage Terrell Mills of Raytown. Defensive end Keith Wright of Sacramento (Calif.) City College should have an immediate impact. Cody Buford of Raytown (South), Mo., now becomes the quarterback of the future for the Tigers.

11. BAYLOR

The Bears didn't sign a lot of prime-time talent, but if outside linebacker John Garrett of Mart, Texas, can make his grades, then they signed one of top pure athletes in the country. Running back Jonathan Golden of Sugar Land (Clements), Texas, was the first to commit to Baylor and stuck with it throughout the recruiting process. Linebacker Robert Forney of Lufkin, Texas, is another talented athlete.

12. TEXAS TECH

New Red Raider Head Coach Mike Leach got a late start on recruiting, and it showed as the class brings up the rear of the Big 12 Conference. Leach did get the quarterback he wanted in Jason Winn of Gardena Hills, Calif., and free safety Rod Ansley of Plainsview, Texas, is a top-50 Texas athlete. The only question on Ansley is whether he can qualify or not? ■



5. TEXAS A&M

This is not the banner class that the Aggies are used to recruiting, barely making the nation's 25 in many polls. However, it's an athletic class, headlined by defensive end Linnus Smith of Tyler (John Tyler), Texas. Wide receiver Robert Ferguson of Tyler Junior College is one of the five JUCO receiver prospects in the country. Cornerback Adam Black of Houston (Cy Falls) and running back Keith Joseph of Houston (Lamar) are top-50 prospects.

6. KANSAS

They Jayhawks signed their best class in years, and many feel it belongs in the top five in the Big 12. Kansas loaded up on junior college talent in All-American defensive end Ervin Holloman of Garden City (Kan.) C.C., talented defensive end Demond



7. OKLAHOMA STATE

The Cowboys signed 29 athletes, with the thought that at least five won't qualify. They also lost in the in-state battle to Oklahoma. However, the Cowboys signed a marquee running back in Tatum Bell of DeSoto, Texas, and Texas top-50 talent in tight end Derrius Whitehead of Waxahachie. Quarterback Andre McGill of Fort Myers, Fla., is a run/pass signal caller who has the Cowboys excited.





CHARLIE



Charlie McBride came to Nebraska in 1977 as defensive line coach.

'You're not only losing the greatest coach ever,
you're losing one of your greatest friends ever'

— **Defensive tackle Loran Kaiser**

Stories by Mike Babcock

Loran Kaiser and Kyle Vanden Bosch occasionally discussed the subject during this past Nebraska football season. As it wound down, they were optimistic that Charlie McBride might stay.

At least, they tried to be optimistic and look for positive signs.

"We knew he didn't have too many (seasons) left in him," Kaiser

said recently.

"But you're hoping for maybe one more year."

That one more year would have been the last for Kaiser and Vanden Bosch. They will be seniors next season. And had McBride stayed, they could have finished together. He and Vanden Bosch "talked about it," said Kaiser. "He sounds like he's going to stick around another year."



Charlie McBride announced his retirement after the Jan. 2 Fiesta Bowl, ending 37 years in coaching, the last 23 at Nebraska. He was the defensive coordinator for 18 years.

Then "three or four days" before the Fiesta Bowl game, Kaiser learned that McBride was calling it quits. When the two met privately, "it was a pretty tough conversation," Kaiser said. "I'm 21-years-old. At this point in my life, it was the toughest thing I've ever been through."

"The way he develops relationships, that's what made it so hard when he said he was leaving. You're not only losing the greatest coach ever, you're losing one of your greatest friends ever."

Most who played for him during 23 years as a Cornhusker assistant, including the last 18 as defensive coordinator, share Kaiser's feelings about McBride. "I don't know how he does it," said Kaiser.

"He's very close to every player on the team. Especially he's got his defensive linemen and his Blackshirts. But he develops a relationship with every player on this team."

"If you're a kicker, a running back, whoever you are . . ."

That's how McBride has always been, according to John Meadows, a senior associate athletic director at Colorado. He and McBride were Buffaloes teammates — both played end.

Though Meadows was two years younger, he and McBride were friends, occasionally going on double dates. "Charlie was approachable by freshmen and seniors alike," Meadows said.

He was a friend "of anybody on his team. I thought that part of his personality was why he was successful. There were no class distinctions with Charlie. He had time for everybody."

As a coach, however, he often disguised that quality. Those who played for him weren't always eager to approach him. "He's got that intimidation factor," said Kaiser. "I've been around here four years and there are still times when he'll say something and a lot of guys will get scared."

"I can pick it up a lot better." But

there were times when he wasn't sure.

"I've tried to be a hard coach," McBride said the morning after the Fiesta Bowl. "I like discipline. I think I learned that probably from Frank Kush. Frank was a disciplinarian and a tough guy."

McBride's first full-time coaching job at the collegiate level was on Kush's staff at Arizona State. Kush hired him as an offensive line coach, with encouragement from, among others, Eddie Crowder, the head coach at Colorado during the time he was a Buffaloes graduate assistant.

Even though McBride had limited coaching experience, Kush didn't hesitate. "Here was a guy who believed in giving kids chances, and he gave me a chance," said McBride.

"People don't do that anymore. That's why I'm so grateful to him. I came right out of college, a grad assistant, and the next day I was on the field coaching. I didn't even know the offense."

He wasn't a complete novice.

CHARLIE



Early on, Charlie McBride may have gotten kids to play more from fear than affection. McBride had mellowed in recent seasons, but he maintained that aura of uncertainty about his moods.

After finishing a degree at Colorado and an unsuccessful tryout with the Denver Broncos, he returned to his native Chicago, where he coached at Parker and Fenger high schools. After two years, he got the urge to move to the next level and went back to Colorado.

In addition to his graduate assistant duties with the freshman team, he taught classes in handball and archery and earned \$5 a day for tamping and lining the baseball field in season.

Although Rudy Feldman, Crowder's top assistant, asked him to diagram blitzes, McBride's future appeared to be as an offensive line coach. That was his responsibility for all three seasons at Arizona State and for the first six of his seven seasons at Wisconsin under Coach John Jardine.

He became Jardine's defensive line coach and defensive coordinator in 1976, and a year later, he joined Tom Osborne's staff as defensive line coach, succeeding Monte Kiffin.

In one of life's ironies, McBride imagined coaching at Nebraska before the opportunity arose. While watching on television as the Cornhuskers lost to Oklahoma 20-17 in 1976, "I went out in the kitchen and told my wife: 'You know, some day I'd really like to work for that guy,'" he said.

That guy, of course, was Osborne. And two months later, McBride got the chance.

Osborne contacted him at the annual college coaches convention in Miami. Why, "I don't know," McBride said. "I've never sat down and asked Tom. But I think Buck Nystrom and Frank Kush both had something to do with it. I'm not too sure they weren't sitting together (with Osborne)."

Nystrom was the line coach at Colorado when McBride played there.

"Tom was looking for a defensive line coach at the time, and I think, from what I heard, my name came

out of both of their mouths at the same time," McBride said.

Whatever the motivation, Osborne called McBride in his room.

"The first thing I said was: 'No, really, who is this?'" said McBride. "Then I said it again because I thought it was one of my friends trying to do it to me. You know how Tom is real quiet."

Osborne identified himself again, and McBride responded in similar fashion.

"Yeah, right buddy," he said.

Finally, Osborne convinced McBride it was no practical joke and asked him to meet for dinner.

"We went to Denny's," McBride said. "Tom had his salad, and I was eating hotdogs..."

Actually, the way his wife Debbie remembers it, he didn't eat anything. "She said all we did was draw circles on napkins. That night, I guess, Tom basically offered me the job."

And he readily accepted. "I really wasn't looking for a job when Tom

CHARLIE

called," he said. "I had the job at Wisconsin, with John Jardine. And hopefully I was loyal to him. But he was getting to the point where he was going to go another year and then get out. I knew John was going to resign."

Osborne made McBride the defensive coordinator in 1982, succeeding Lance Van Zandt one season after he left for an assistant's job in the National Football League.

No one had the defensive coordinator's title in 1981.

"Basically, I kind of ran it (the defense)," McBride said.

"Tom felt there were qualified people. I asked him why he chose me. I guess I kind of have a knack for maybe handling kids. That's why I went from offense to defense (at Wisconsin).

"It wasn't that I knew the defense. I was like the run coordinator (for the Badgers). It was the fact, he (Jardine) told me: 'You have the ability to get kids to play.'"

That ability served him well for 37 years.

Early on, he might have gotten kids to play more from fear than from affection. And even though he has mellowed in recent seasons, he has maintained that aura of uncertainty about his moods.

When Kaiser was recruited out of St. Paul, Neb., High School, he knew he would play defense, but he didn't know whether he would be a line-backer, a rush end or a tackle.

After playing all three positions in the Shrine Bowl all-star game, it appeared he would be tried at rush end, which was coached by Tony Samuel, "a nice laid-back guy," Kaiser said.

When he reported with the freshmen for two-a-day practices, however, he was told to report with Steve Warren, another scholarship defensive tackle, to McBride.

"We were like: 'Oh, oh.' I'd heard all the rumors, all the stories," he said.

Jeff Ogard, a Cornhusker defensive tackle from St. Paul, had filled him in.

"He told me: 'You'd better be ready for this one.' And he gave me a few pointers."

Though he knew what to expect, he was still intimidated by McBride. Most players are. And a few never overcome it. But Kaiser did.

"I wouldn't give any of it back for the world," he said. ■

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Knee Problems Hurt McBride's Athletic Career

Colorado punter, end had brief tryout with Denver Broncos

On the morning of the Nebraska-Colorado football game in November of 1961, a Lincoln newspaper ran a photo of Colorado senior Reed Johnson standing on a swimming pool diving board.

The pool was at the Lincoln motel where the Buffaloes were staying.

The human-interest photo had obviously been staged.

It had snowed the day the photo was taken. The cutline read: "Buff Reed Johnson Tests Snowy Diving Board At A Lincoln Motel While Other Colorado Gridders Watch."

Charlie "Chuck" McBride was among the other Colorado players.

McBride was a senior in 1961, when the Buffaloes defeated Nebraska 7-0.

The snow, which resumed and came down as flurries during the game, turned the field at Memorial

Stadium into "an immense quagmire that made player uniforms resemble skin-diving suits rather than football togs," Don Bryant wrote in the next day's Sunday Journal and Star.

But it wasn't the snow or the 30-degree temperature that stifled Nebraska. Rather, it was the Colorado defense, which didn't allow a first down and only 31 yards of total offense, all in the first half.

The Cornhuskers attempted 12 passes, all incomplete. They never crossed mid-field. And the farthest they got from their own goal line in the second half was their own 28, on a fumble recovery.

The loss wasn't the most lopsided in the 3-6-1 season that ended Bill Jennings' five-year tenure as Nebraska's head coach. But it might well have been the most futile.

And although it could hardly be singled out as the reason for Jennings'



Fifty Years on the Fly: The Orange Bowl Story

dismissal, it certainly didn't do the beleaguered coach any good. So in that sense, you might say, McBride had an impact, though admittedly minor, on Nebraska's football fortunes long before he became an assistant.

Bob Devaney replaced Jennings the next season. And the rest is history.

Nebraska wasn't lacking talent in 1961. "The players they had, wow," McBride once said, recalling that game. "They just needed something new, and Bob brought it out."

McBride was in his third season as Colorado's punter, and he was a second-team end, backing up junior Ken Blair. McBride probably would have been the starter if not for a knee problem that would end his playing career a year later, after a brief tryout with the fledgling Denver Broncos.

Though undrafted, he received a signing bonus from the Broncos as well as the promise of an off-season job if he made the team. But "I was hurting pretty bad," he said.

"They kept draining my knee, and it got to be a punch board."

Near the end of training camp, he was cut. After he got the news from Mac Speedie, his position coach, veteran quarterback Frank Tripucka put an arm on his shoulder.

"Chuck, this is the best thing that

THE GREAT CHEWING GUM CAPER

McBride and a teammate at Colorado, Mel Semenko, bought an old DeSoto convertible for \$50 and used it for transportation home at break time. McBride lived in Chicago, Semenko in Jeannette, Pa. So Semenko would drop him off on the way home and pick him up on the way back to Boulder.

On one trip along U.S. Highway 6, they were stopped for speeding in Holdrege, Neb.

The procedure was that they would have to put money for the fine in an envelope along with the ticket and mail it before the officer would let them continue on their way.

"The ticket was \$40 and we only had \$50 between us," said McBride.

So he used a trick he had learned growing up in Chicago. He kept chewing gum in the glove box just for such a situation. While driving to a mailbox, "I started chewing like crazy," he said.

He stuck the gum to the back of the envelope, and as he opened the door on the mail slot, he stuck the letter to the inside of it. He and Semenko drove away, as did the officer, who was satisfied that the fine had been mailed. They drove around the block, retrieved the envelope and resumed their trip.



LSU's Gene Sykes blocks a Chuck McBride punt in the second half of the 1962 Orange Bowl and recovers for a touchdown as the Tigers capitalize on mistakes in the Colorado kicking game to win 25-7.

could have happened to you," Tripucka said.

The knee problem took away McBride's greatest asset as an athlete — his speed. He was a sprinter at Chicago's Morgan Park High School, good enough to qualify for the state meet as a senior.

That speed also served him well in other sports. He played centerfield and pitched for the Morgan Park baseball team and "played all over the place" on the football team.

Mostly, however, he was an end on offense and a back on defense.

He got into a varsity game at Soldier Field as a defensive back when he was a freshman.

Morgan Park was playing Lindblom High, and the starter went to the sideline with an injury. So he was sent in with instructions to play deep and not let Jim Gibbons get behind him. Gibbons, an all-city receiver, went on to play at Iowa and then 11 seasons with the NFL's Detroit Lions.

"Sure enough, he beat me deep," said McBride.

That was an exception, however. McBride became an all-city football

and baseball player, who was good enough to be offered \$500 by Paul Richards to sign with the Chicago White Sox.

He had a strong arm as well as speed and played centerfield when he wasn't pitching. A coach described him as "the one kid (on the team) who could throw a ball through a brick wall, but you didn't know where it would hit the wall," McBride said. "I was a little wild."

He once hit a batter with a pitch and "I thought he was dead," McBride said.

"You could see the imprint of the laces" where the ball hit the batter.

McBride's reputation for strikeouts carried over to his own batting. He was presented with a bat through which a hole had been drilled during a home room assembly in high school.

"I led the team in striking out," he said.

When Richards offered him the \$500 signing bonus, his father declined on his behalf.

"My old man said: 'I think not. He'll go to college,'" said McBride.

His parents left the college choice

up to him, which is how he ended up at Colorado after considering most of the Big Ten schools. "My folks really kind of let me dig my own ditch," he said.

Purdue, which was recruiting a high school teammate, initially considered him too small, at 6-foot-1 and 180 pounds. Boilermaker Coach Jack Mollenkopf changed his mind after learning about McBride's track exploits, but it was too late. "My dad told him to get out," McBride said.

In addition to Purdue, he also visited Illinois, Iowa, Michigan State and Wisconsin before accepting a scholarship from Colorado. "I went to Colorado on a whim," he said.

Dal Ward was the Buffaloes coach at the time, but he was fired at the end of McBride's freshman season and replaced by Sonny Grandelius, who came from Michigan State.

"It was devastating to me when Dal got fired," McBride said.

Colorado was 5-5 McBride's sophomore year and 6-4 when he was a junior, setting the stage for 1961, when the Buffaloes went 9-1 in the regular season to win the Big Eight championship and earn a bid to play in the Orange Bowl game against Southeastern Conference champion LSU.

The conference title was Colorado's first since 1942.

The Orange Bowl game was forgettable. LSU Coach Paul Dietzel used a three-platoon system to frustrate the Buffaloes in a 25-7 victory. "They just wore us out," said McBride.

LSU also took advantage of the fact that Colorado's deep-snapper tipped off when he was about to center the ball and blocked two McBride punts. The first went out of the end zone for a safety, which made the score 5-0, and the second was recovered for a touchdown for the game's final points.

McBride has occasionally joked about the blocked punts.

But they obscure the fact that he was an outstanding athlete, with exceptional speed before the knee problem. Ted Woods, a Colorado teammate who played six seasons in the Canadian Football League, was an Olympic sprinter. But "Ted couldn't beat me in the 100-yard dash in pads," McBride said. ■



Chuck McBride (pictured in the 1960 Colorado-Nebraska program).

A Career Full of Memories

FAMILY TIES

After two years of coaching at the high school level in Chicago, McBride decided he wanted to move to the college level, a step that would first require a graduate assistant's job.

So he sent a letter to Woody Hayes, asking if there were openings at Ohio State.

McBride figured Hayes might help him since the Buckeyes' head coach had been his father's roommate when the two were freshmen at Denison College in Granville, Ohio.

McBride had been barely a teenager when he first met Hayes.

The replay he got from Hayes was to the point.

"Dear Chuck," it said. "No."

It was signed: "Woody."

Five years later, after serving as a graduate assistant at Colorado and as an offensive line coach at Arizona State, McBride was in his first season as offensive line coach at Wisconsin.

Before the Badgers' game against Ohio State in Columbus, Ohio, McBride walked past Hayes, who was leaning against a goal post, watching his Buckeyes warm up.

"Hey McBride, are you as dumb as your old man?" Hayes asked.

"I was kind of intimidated," McBride recalled. "I didn't really know what to say."

Wisconsin went ahead early in the game, setting off a Hayes tantrum on the sideline and causing McBride to smile. Ohio State quickly recovered, however, and won 56-7.

Afterward, Hayes charged across the field, without stopping for a post-game handshake with Wisconsin Coach John Jardine, and confronted a surprised McBride, who was heading to the locker room. "McBride, I just want you to know one thing: You are as dumb as your old man," he said.

The story brings a smile to McBride's face. "Actually, Woody, for as tough of an old guy as he was, he was probably one of the most thoughtful people," said McBride.

"He was always concerned about my folks."

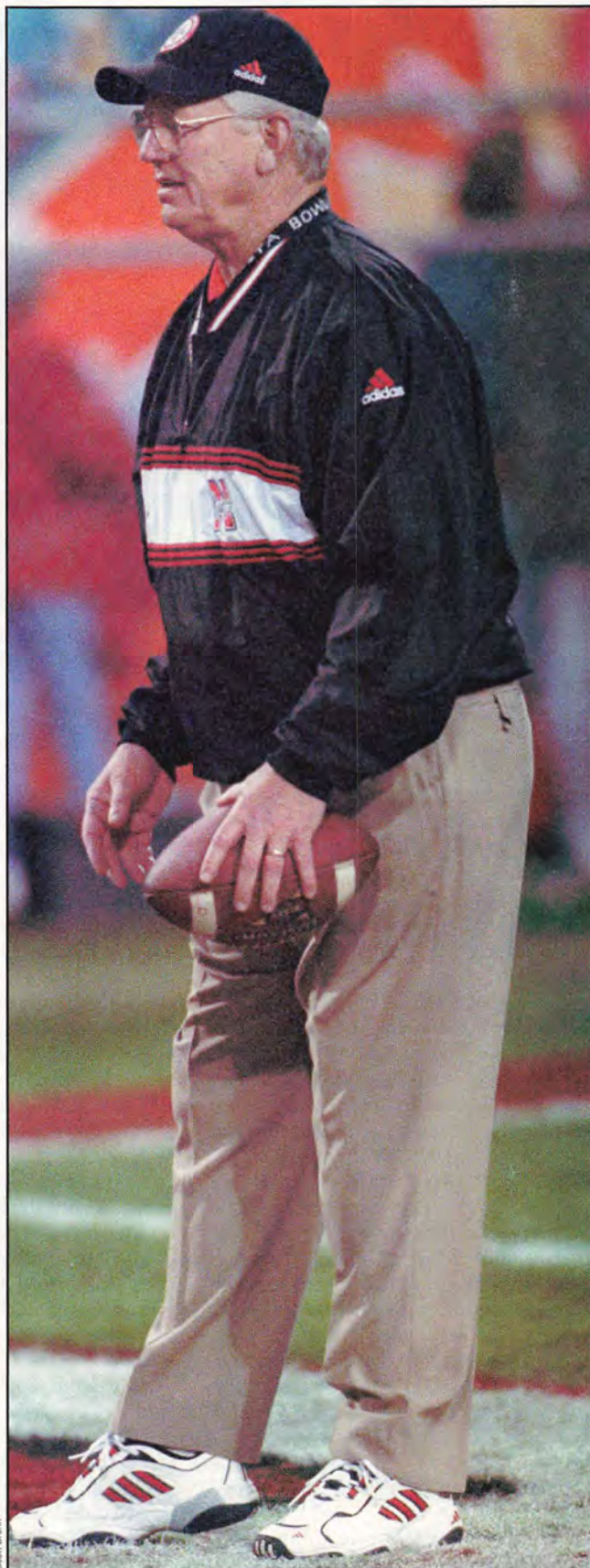
CALL ME CHARLIE NOT CHUCK

Among the first things he did when he arrived at Nebraska in 1977 was set the record straight about his first name. "I'm not 'Chuck,'" he told Cornhusker Coach Tom Osborne.

Growing up in Chicago, "nobody called me Chuck," he said. "I didn't like it."

Nevertheless, he was called "Chuck" when he was recruited and throughout his career at Colorado, as well as while he was an assistant at Arizona State and Wisconsin. Paul Roach, with whom he coached on John Jardine's staff at Wisconsin, "called me both (Chuck and Charlie)," he said.

"I told Tom (Osborne): 'It's not Chuck, it's Charlie.'" And he's been Charlie ever since.



CHARLIE

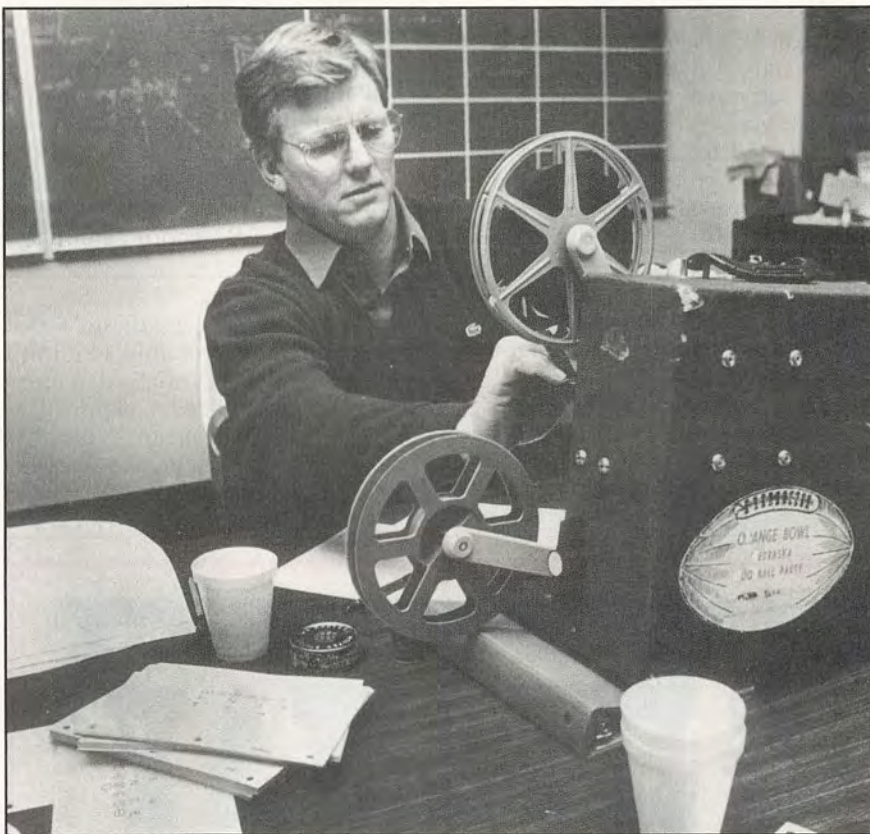
RECRUITING HIGHS, AND LOWS

McBride's recruiting responsibilities included Chicago, and he helped the Cornhuskers get many outstanding players from that area, among them Ed Stewart, Nate Turner and Mike Murray, all of whom played at perennial Catholic League power Mount Carmel High School.

Among the highlights of his recruiting, however, was the signing of Darren Williams, a linebacker from St. Martin. Williams came from a broken home and "didn't think anyone was interested in him," said McBride. "He broke down and cried when we offered him a scholarship."

Williams earned letters in 1991, 1992 and 1993.

The recruitment of Neil Smith was among the most remarkable stories during McBride's 23 years at Nebraska. Jack Pierce, who coordinated the Cornhuskers' recruiting at the time, "brought a film back of another guy" from New Orleans in whom Nebraska was interested,



Charlie McBride watched many hours of film in his 23 years at Nebraska.

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CHARLIE

McBride said.

"I said I didn't know about that guy but this other one can play."

The other one was Smith, who stood 6-foot-5 but weighed barely 200 pounds when he arrived at Nebraska. "We were short of linemen, so we had to take him," said McBride.

"And then he becomes Superman."

Smith's mom, Lutisha, was overjoyed that the Cornhuskers had given her son a scholarship. "She must have said 'God bless you' 350

COACHING EXPERIENCE

1963-64	Fenger (Ill.) High School (head coach)
1965-66	Colorado (graduate assistant)
1967-69	Arizona State (assistant coach)
1970-76	Wisconsin (assistant coach)
1977-81	Nebraska (assistant coach/defensive line)
1982-99	Nebraska (def. coordinator/def. line)

to 1,000 times," McBride said. Ironically, "we probably wouldn't have recruited Neil Smith now because he would be too skinny."

Nebraska backed off NFL line-backer Simeon Rice because he was too skinny. Rice, another Chicago

high school product, went to Illinois, where he earned All-America honors.

"If I had pushed it, we probably could have gotten him," said McBride.

"I knew his skill, that he was another Neil Smith."

McBride's most "monumental recruiting screw-

up," however involved a running back at North High School in Wichita, Kansas was among his recruiting areas, and he had been told "there's a kid who really wants to come to Nebraska." The kid was Barry Sanders.

"We had just got Terry Rodgers, and Tom said we couldn't take another small running back," McBride said. "So we turned him down because we didn't want two small backs."

Oklahoma State didn't exactly welcome Sanders with open arms, according to McBride. "Pat Jones said Oklahoma State told him if they had something left over, they'd give it to him."

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TURN IT OVER

On a recruiting visit to a high school in Chicago, McBride was confronted by what appeared to be a student brandishing a gun, just inside a main door. "Give me your money," he said.

"I don't carry money around here," said McBride, who was more surprised than scared.

"Then give me your coat," the youngster said.

McBride handed him the Nebraska red coat, which the robber put on. It hung below his knees.

McBride immediately went to the principal's office to report the theft.

"I've just been robbed," he said.

Minutes later, the culprit was brought to the principal's office, still wearing McBride's red coat. "Is this your coat?" the principal asked. McBride said it was.

As it turned out, the gun wasn't real, and the robber had already been reprimanded several times for trying to take lunch money from students as they entered the school.

Everyone, including the police, knew him.

"It's a different world," McBride said. ■

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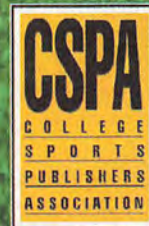
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**Communication key
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What we have here is failure to communicate . . . Kimani Ffriend was supposed to leave the player he was guarding during a recent Nebraska basketball practice and move into "help-side" position. "Get off. Get off," Coach Danny Nee yelled.

Nee meant Ffriend was supposed to leave his man, to "get off" him.

But the junior center took the words literally and left the court.

"What are you doing?" Nee asked.

"You said get off," Ffriend replied.

"That's where the communication and understanding are," Nee said.

Ffriend smiled when asked about the incident.

"That's been a great concern with the communication because where I'm from, people are used to doing things different," he said. "When he (Nee) talks to me, sometimes I take it negative when he doesn't mean it negative.

"But the communication is getting much better."

Ffriend can be forgiven the confusion. He's from Kingston, Jamaica, and didn't begin playing organized basketball until he attended DeKalb, Ga., Junior College two years ago. He played most of last season at Gulf Coast, Fla., Community College, and that's the extent of his experience.

He plays the game "on instinct, athletic

Junior center Kimani Ffriend is on pace to break the school single-season record for blocked shots (91), set by Derrick Chandler in the 1991-92 season.



Scott Braun

talent," said Nee. "God gave him some talent: size, quickness, great coordination. Now we're trying to develop a mental approach to give him consistency."

Ffriend ran the 40-yard dash in 4.79 seconds in fall physical testing. His vertical jump was 30 inches, and his 10-yard dash time of 1.67 seconds was second on the team to Cookie Belcher's.

If Ffriend can develop consistency, "he has a chance of being a pro," Nee said.

The realization of Ffriend's potential has been a bright spot in a sometimes-glum season for Nee's Cornhuskers, who have seen great expectations turn into a battle for respectability.

The 6-foot-11, 220-pound Ffriend was chosen as the "Big 12 Rookie of the Week" three times in January, and he led the team in scoring and rebounding in the first six conference games.

In five of the first 19 games, he blocked five or more shots and was on pace to break the school single-season record for blocked shots (91), set by Derrick Chandler in 1991-92.

He broke the Big 12 single-game record by grabbing 21 rebounds in an 80-65 victory against Oral Roberts, and he pulled down 19 rebounds in a 69-55 victory against Baylor.

He also scored 21 points and blocked three shots against the Bears.

"Man, I take a whole lot of pleasure (in blocking shots), but you guys don't seem to give people who block shots much credit," he told reporters during a news conference two days later.

His words were punctuated with a smile. "It's always who scored the most or rebounding — 21 points, 19 rebounds," he said. "Those three blocked shots were something too, you know?"

Nee doesn't dispute that. Ffriend's shot blocking "has just been excellent," he said.

Early in the season, Ffriend was just playing. "Now he's slowly getting a game together," said Nee. Even so, "he's still a horrible practice player on some days, horrible."

"And then on other days he's magnificent."

Ffriend has been up and down this season and will continue to be.

"A lot of it is his mental make-up," Nee told reporters following the Baylor game. "If he can come with the 'A' game and stay focused,

RIM SHOTS

Notes And Quotes From The Basketball World

DOUBLE DUTY FOR DAVISON

Football player Matt Davison joined Coach Danny Nee's team on Jan. 10 and five days later he played 16 minutes in the Cornhuskers' 97-82 loss against Kansas at Lawrence.

His statistics were impressive: two points, three assists, one steal, no turnovers.

Since then, his playing time has varied, depending on the situation, which was his intention when he asked Coach Frank Solich for permission to give basketball a try.

"I can contribute if they need me," Davison said at a news conference on the day he joined the team. "I can give the guys that have been here and are leading this team a break when they need it."

"I just think that's what my role's going to be. I love to compete. And I love to win games. I'll do whatever it takes to win, and that's what I think I bring to the table."

"Hopefully they can use the things I bring to this program."

Davison was a Super-State basketball player at Tecumseh, Neb., High School, and before former Cornhusker football Coach Tom Osborne offered him a scholarship, following his junior season, he imagined his athletic future in college probably would be as a basketball player.

"When Coach Osborne calls, obviously you say yes," said Davison.

"It was a surprise to me. I hadn't really worked on the game of football. I hadn't really ever set my mind on being a good football player and I wanted to see what I could do."

"I felt like if I really set my mind to I that I would hopefully do something special. That's what I came here with, the mindset of just being as good of a football player as I could be."

The junior split end has led the team in receiving the last two seasons and he's on pace to move up to second on the school's career-receptions list before he's finished. Plus, he made the dramatic catch at Missouri to keep Nebraska's national championship hopes alive in 1997.



Matt Davison plays defense.

A POINT FOR THE FUTURE

Davison wasn't the basketball team's only newcomer on the first day of second semester classes. John Robinson II also practiced with the Cornhuskers for the first time.

Robinson, a 6-foot-1, 180-pound point guard, transferred from New Mexico, where he started 30 of 34 games last season for a 25-9 team that reached the second round of the NCAA Tournament. He will be eligible second semester next year and have two-and-a-half seasons of eligibility.

Robinson, who is from Houston and knows the Cornhuskers' Louis Truscott, left New Mexico because his playing time had dropped significantly under head coach Fran Fraschilla.

Nee talked with Fraschilla, a former assistant, about Robinson. "Absolutely. That's how it started," said Nee. "That's exactly where it started, with a phone call to Fran."

Robinson could have an immediate impact when he becomes eligible because the Cornhuskers' point guard play has been less than stellar at times this season.

BRIEFLY NOTED

— Nee got some moral support from Kansas Coach Roy Williams following Nebraska's loss at Lawrence. Williams said he was shocked that Nee had been catching "some heat."

"That's not right," he said. "Nebraska has nine straight years in post-season play. I'm pretty good on basketball history. I didn't know Nebraska was such a great basketball power before Danny got there."

— The Cornhuskers had a rare triple double-double in their 70-67 victory against Texas Tech. Truscott, Ffriend and Steffon Bradford each finished in double figures in points and rebounds. "That's great," Nee said afterward. "When did you ever see three Nebraska players with double-doubles?"

The last time it happened was Jan. 27, 1992, when Derrick Chandler, Carl Hayes and Dapreis Owens did it. Ironically, Nebraska lost that game to Oklahoma 79-76 at the Devaney Sports Center. ■

the talent and potential are absolutely there.

"I think it's going to be a process, three steps forward and one step back. To expect him to put up those kind of numbers, 19 rebounds and 21 points, every night is, I think, asking a little too much. But I do think he has the potential and ability to become a dominating player in this league."

Ffriend has responded to his toughest challenges. He had 20 points and seven rebounds against Minnesota's 7-foot-1 Joel Przybilla and 23 points and 14 rebounds against Kansas's Eric Chenoweth and Nick Collison, both of whom fouled out trying to control him down low.

He had 12 points and eight rebounds against Texas's Chris Mihm.

"It's amazing that he's come this far, this quick," Nee said.

During a pre-season news conference Nee described Ffriend as "high maintenance," a fact reflected in his emotional play. At times he has been distracted by the emotion of the moment.

"One of my big things right now is, I don't handle distractions well," Ffriend said in early January. "This is all a learning experience. Once I can handle the distractions, I'll get better."

"So far I'm doing a pretty good job."

During the Baylor game, he took an elbow in the eye.

"A month ago, I don't think I would have handled it well," he said afterward. "Today when I got hit in the eye, I still played through it. I didn't let it affect me. Back then I would have gotten upset and I would have started not thinking about just playing basketball, you know?"

The incident occurred "about three minutes into the game," he said.

The elbow belonged to Baylor center Ben Echols, "the big dude," said Ffriend. "When I was going for an offensive rebound, he just hit me. So I was like: 'All right then, that's cool.'"

"I guess it got me motivated, you know?"

Ffriend grabbed nine rebounds

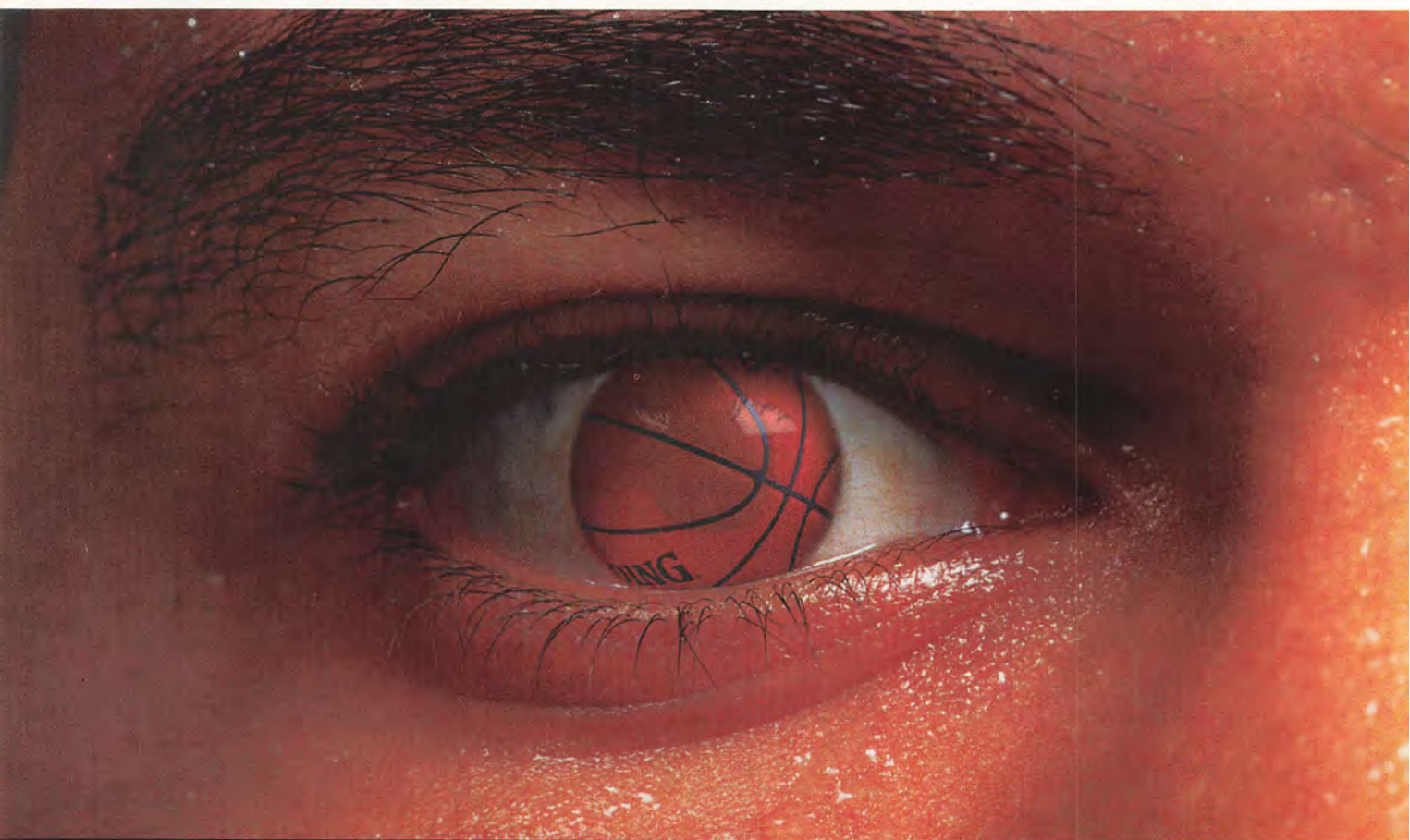
but scored only eight points in the first conference home game, a 66-65 loss against Iowa State. He was matched against the Cyclones' Marcus Fizer, "and I tried to do too much," Ffriend said. "It was like I was trying to prove something. And it didn't work."

Since then, he has been more consistent, though he still has occasional lapses, which is understandable. "It's just the experience of going through it," said Nee.

"There's nothing I can base what he's done in basketball on, anything like this, (because) he's never stayed on the team a whole season and gone through the highs and lows of it. He didn't understand college basketball, the makeup of it, the team concept of it, the physicalness..."

"Kimani is just halfway through the alphabet in understanding (the game). Once he gets through it once... I think next year and (in) the summer we'll build on it, and then he'll even put words together at one point. But right now we're just trying to get through the alphabet."

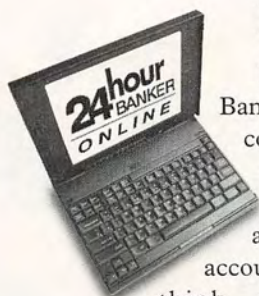
And as they have, the communication has improved. ■



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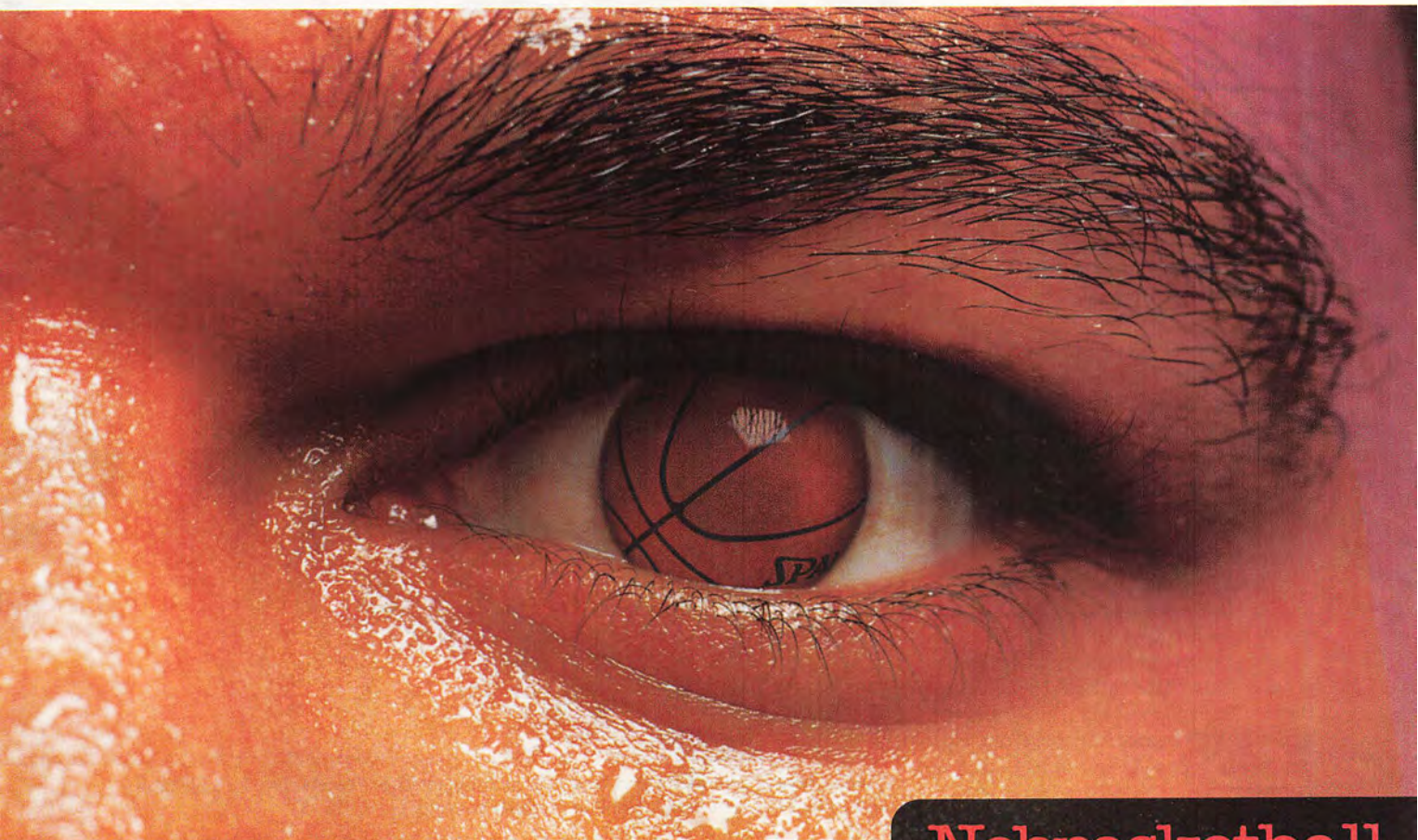
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HOOPS

In the Home Stretch

Senior forward Rogers survived early doubts to prosper at Nebraska

The recollection might be a bit inexact.

The passing of time can distort events, making them seem better or worse. But time can't soften the memory of those daily walks from the dorm to Memorial Stadium for Charlie Rogers.

She was a freshman, and each morning she would join her Nebraska basketball teammates at the stadium for strength and conditioning workouts in preparation for the season.

The players would run and lift. And they'd begin at 6 a.m. "I remember it being so cold in the morning, being so tired and wondering what in the world I was doing here," Rogers said.

"I wanted to go home. It was really hard because that's when you're homesick anyway."

The first semester at college is usually the most difficult. And it certainly was for Rogers.

As she went through those daily workouts in the fall of 1996, "you think: There's no way I'm going to make it until tomorrow, let alone (to) my senior year," she said. "But it goes fast."

In retrospect, four years seem to have flown by, as if she had been shorted a month or two in each. Barely a month from now, she will be finished. Her playing career will



Senior forward Charlie Rogers (right) is nearing the top 10 on Nebraska's all-time rebounding list. She ranks No. 2 in blocked shots.

be over.

That will be extremely difficult because she has been playing orga-

nized basketball since she was in the fourth grade in South Sioux City, Neb.

"I guess I've thought about that," she said. "It's kind of one of those things that you don't really want to think about but you can't help it, you know?"

"It's like, you think about dying sometimes but you don't want to."

Even though there is life after basketball, Rogers has spent precious little time contemplating it. "I don't have any idea what it's going to be like to not play anymore," she said.

"Basketball has always been my identity. It's been a huge part of who I am."

And it will remain a significant part of her life, just not as a player.

Rogers has come a long way during her time at Nebraska. She arrived as a scholarship recruit, a product of a South Sioux City High School program that has risen to national prominence. She was among those who helped build the foundation for the tradition that continues to grow there.

South Sioux City won back-to-back state championships in Nebraska's second-largest classification during her final two years. And those teams won 41 consecutive games.

A four-year starter, she earned Super-State honors as a senior, averaging 18.7 points, 10.3 rebounds, 3.7 steals and 3.2 blocks per game. And she finished as the school's career-rebound leader.

Despite that success, however, she was a self-effacing Husker freshman. "I don't think I lacked confidence," she said. "But I was ready to be a role player for the rest of my career."

"I was willing to do whatever they needed me to. I knew I wasn't going to be an All-American. Not that I didn't dream about that, but my freshman year I was pretty content just to be here. I guess I was lucky, kind of. I was a good player for Nebraska, the state, but I wasn't anything spectacular."

"It's just such an ego change. When you're in high school you really don't have to work that hard. I mean, you have to work hard, obviously. But everybody here is at least as good as you are."

With that in mind, Rogers worked diligently to improve. And though she considered herself a role player, she developed quickly enough to be a part-time starter her first two seasons.

She has excelled in the role of shot-blocker and rebounder. She moved ahead of Maurice Ivy into

second place in career blocked shots at Nebraska, and she leads the team in rebounds. If she maintains her current pace, she will move into the top 10 in career rebounds by season's end.

"I love to rebound," she said. "I don't know why somebody wouldn't want to rebound. How is it easier to score than to get the ball two feet from the basket and put it back up there?"

That attitude has contributed to a career field goal percentage well over .500.

Plus, "it doesn't take any athletic skills or brains to rebound," she said with a smile.

Maybe not. But she has both in abundance. She is a three-time, first-team academic all-conference honoree, majoring in elementary education and special education. Because of the time demands of basketball, she has another year to go. Then she plans to teach, and possibly coach.

However, "I might take a couple of years off (from basketball)," she said.

Rogers is among five Husker seniors. The others are Nicole Kubik, Brooke Schwartz, Naciska Gilmore and Monique Whitfield, who trans-

ferred from junior college a year ago.

Kubik, Schwartz and Gilmore were members of Rogers' recruiting class. They've gone through the program together, helping each other get through the difficult times.

There were times early on when Rogers thought about quitting.

"Everybody has those days," she said. But she always found a reason to stay.

"One day it might have been Nicole just doing something stupid and then I'd laugh at her and I couldn't imagine being anywhere else. I like this place and I like these people."

And that won't change when she is finished playing. She intends to be a regular at Husker games while she's completing her degree next year. "It'll be hard at first," she said. "But these are my friends, my family, and I don't think I could be away from them just because it was hard for me."

"That would be selfish. And I owe a lot to this university and to my coaches and my teammates."

"I will never stop watching them or stop caring about them."

Of that she is certain, even though the future never is. ■

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Ben Wright

Adam Pine ranks as one of the world's fastest swimmers in the 100-meter butterfly.

Sharing a Dream

**Nebraska swimmer
Sasha Pine 'stresses' as
husband competes**

By Todd Henrichs

Sasha Pine has all the typical concerns of a collegiate athlete in her senior season.

She hopes to finish with a flourish and for the first time win All-America honors for the Nebraska swim team. Graduation, too, is on the horizon and the prospect of hunting for a job.

But as spring rapidly approaches, those aren't the things that at times preoccupy the mind of the Australia

native. Instead, Pine finds herself thinking more about the hopes and dreams of her newlywed husband, fellow Husker senior Adam Pine.

"I get so nervous before he races, but I don't get nervous before I race," she confessed. "He's very laid back, and if he gets nervous, he doesn't show it."

"I guess I'm the one that stresses. I stress for him all the time."

The new year promises to be a stress test for the new Mrs. Pine, who shared her vows July 31, 1999, in Sydney, Australia.

Adam Pine ranks as one the world's fastest swimmers in the 100-meter butterfly. He entered his senior season as Nebraska's most decorated male swimmer in NCAA competition.



Sasha Pine was a finalist in five events during the 1996 Olympic Trials.

Pine is a 15-time All-American in three seasons at NU. He twice has finished second at the NCAA championships. A national title would be the first by a Nebraska swimmer or diver, male or female.

Pine figures to contend for top honors at the NCAA meet in March in Minneapolis, yet even the relaxed member of the family admits his thoughts could be half a world away.

In May, Pine must race against the best swimmers in the world in his one attempt to represent Australia in the Olympic Games to be staged there this September. As you might imagine, the chance to swim for his country in home water would be a dream come true.

"That's pretty much what I'm aiming for," Pine matter-of-factly said.

But unlike some Husker teammates, including world record-holder Therese Alshammar, Pine did not take this year off from Nebraska to train full-time for his Olympic bid.

Instead, Pine and NU assistant Keith Moore worked out a training schedule they believe prepares him for the NCAA meet as well as the Olympic trials two months later.

Simply put, the intensive part of the training schedule was pushed back allowing Pine to work more in the weight room instead of the pool.

"We've eased into the year a little bit more," Moore said. "We'll see him swim very fast at NAAs, and he will just get better and better as he gets closer to his trials."

"But will he become an NCAA champ? That's up to Adam."

Pine was second in the 100-yard butterfly as a freshman and again at last season's NCAA meet. But the greater sting may have been finishing third in his country's Olympic trials in 1996, missing by one place a spot on the Australian delegation to Atlanta.

"Eventually I'm going to live in Australia, and the NCAA doesn't mean much at all to the average person there," Pine said. "But the Olympics mean everything."

"Sure, now that I've been to a few NAAs, I'd love to win. It'd be great, but it's not going to be the end of the world to me."

Pine's commitment to his homeland shouldn't be surprising given the commitment he shares with his wife.

The two first met as young teens at a camp for age-group swimmers in their home state. Later, both moved to an Olympic training center — the Australian Institute of Sport — and began dating there in 1994.

Two years and plenty of dinners

and movies later, Nebraska assistant Rick Paine was recruiting the former Sasha Van Hamburg, when the young Aussie asked if the Huskers had room for her boyfriend on the team.

"I said I only wanted to come to Nebraska if I could bring Adam along with me," Sasha recalled. "He asked, 'Are you serious? Are there two Adam Pines or are you talking about the good Adam Pine?'"

The rest, Adam said, "is history."

But Nebraska head coach Cal Bentz believes the final chapter won't be written any time soon. He sees a chance for Pine to win his collegiate title and make a splash at home in the Olympics.

Despite her nerves, Sasha, too, is

confident. Herself a finalist in five different events during the 1996 Olympic trials, she's been taught the importance of chasing a dream from an early age.

Her parents were Olympians, her dad for Holland and her mom for Australia.

Watching how it plays out for her husband should be an exhilarating, nerve-wracking experience.

But for now, Pine is relaxed in knowing he'll have his shot.

"I'm very positive about it," he said. "You do your best that day and you get in, and if you're off your best or you're not quite there, then you miss out."

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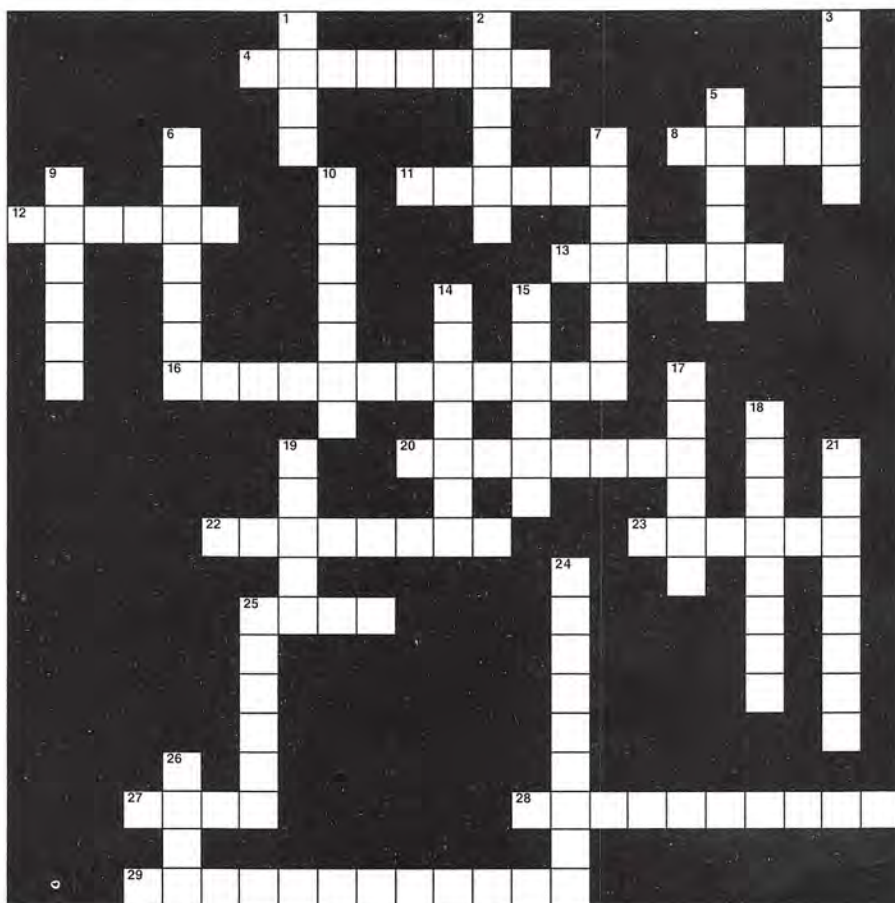
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- 28 NU's senior assistant coach
- 29 1999 national champion

DOWN

- 1 Backup quarterback in 2000
- 2 New defensive line coach
- 3 NU athletic director
- 5 Nation's No. 2 rushing QB in 1999
- 6 2000 I-back recruit
- 7 Republican candidate for Congress
- 9 NU rush end coach
- 10 NU's No. 3 (offense)
- 14 Ex-Husker on Super Bowl

champs

- 15 NU's No. 3 (defense)
- 17 NU's No. 9 (defense)
- 18 Dan Alexander's home state
- 19 Novak Trophy winner
- 21 1999 deep snapper
- 24 2000 road opener
- 25 2000 tight end recruit
- 26 New defensive coordinator

Answers in April issue

FEBRUARY SOLUTION



O&A

Huskers Illustrated talks with gymnast Heather Brink

Heather Brink, a 5-foot-2 senior from Lincoln, Neb., is the most-decorated gymnast in Husker history. A six-time All-American, she finished fifth in last season's NCAA meet, the highest finish ever by a Husker. She represented the United States in the World University Games last summer in Spain.

What was your favorite part of your trip to Bermuda last month for a meet?

"I think it was just the aspect of being there. I think the best thing was being able to relax after the meet and spend a lot of fun time with the team and my family. It was a nice two-day break."

You've traveled extensively as a gymnast. What's your favorite spot?

"I really enjoyed Gainesville, Fla., and I also really enjoyed Hawaii. But I would never go back to Hawaii if I was paying for it because it's so expensive. But I could see myself in Florida for awhile."

If you weren't a gymnast, what type of athlete would you be?

"I don't know . . . I did diving and swimming for awhile when I was little. I always pondered diving in my fifth year of college. But I don't think I will, although I think it would be fun."

What is the scariest apparatus?

"I would have to say the scariest is the vault. That's kind of strange since it's my best event. But I do a trick where if one thing goes wrong, it will be the last time I run down the vault runway, you know? So you have to have good concentration."

What's the worst fall you've suffered?

"Probably when I hurt my anterior cruciate ligament. I was tumbling and landed and twisted at the same time. It just tore."

What's your favorite rock group and why?

"I like country music a lot. I used to hate country music before I moved to Oklahoma (to train full time as an age-group gymnast). Being down there, I started liking it. Garth Brooks and Reba are my favorites. 'The River' (by Brooks) is probably one of my favorite songs. It has good motivational words in it."

Do you have a pre-meet regimen you go through?

"I really don't have a regimen, but there are certain things I like to do. If I have a good meet with my hair a certain way, I like to carry that over into the next meet. And each time before an event, I like to say a prayer. God's watching over me in everything I do, and He works in strange ways. Hopefully he'll keep me healthy."

Heather Brink has won two Big 12 Conference all-around titles.

When you look back, what do you consider your best achievement as a gymnast?

"I would have to say it was coming back from my ACL injury (in 1995). At the time, it was such a career-ending injury and you didn't hear of too many people coming back from it. But I made the U.S. national team that year."

Why does your Husker coach, Dan Kendig, drink so much Mountain Dew?

"I don't know . . . He says he drinks it because he just doesn't like the other pops."

— STEVE SIPPLE



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Small-town athletes get little notice from national recruiting 'experts'



Mike BABCOCK

STEVE KRIEWALD AND BEN ZAJICEK probably won't attract much attention from the presumptuous, and proliferating, national analysts and Internet experts who rank football recruiting classes.

Kriewald played eight-man football at North Loup-Scotia, Neb., High School.

Zajicek received only Class B all-state honorable mention from the Lincoln and Omaha newspapers, though that was, in part, a result of his having missed four

games with a shoulder injury.

Neither made an official recruiting visit to any school except Nebraska, and both have grown up dreaming of playing for the Cornhuskers, a personality trait that will serve them well.

(Zajicek is from Beatrice, which is big only in comparison to Kriewald's home, Scotia.)

Among the many factors that have contributed to Nebraska's success over the last four decades is a unique home-state commitment, foreign to those who have grown up elsewhere.

But analysts don't evaluate recruits on commitment, and they seem to have little or no interest in learning about athletes from rural communities in low-population states such as Nebraska.

If Kriewald were "positioned anywhere else in the country, and if he (were) surrounded by 10 players rather than seven players, he would probably have been . . . recruited nationwide," Cornhusker Coach Frank Solich said during a news conference to announce this season's recruiting class.

The 5-foot-11, 250-pound fullback is believed to be only the fourth eight-man scholarship recruit from Nebraska during the Tom Osborne-Solich era. The others were Terry Connealy (Hyannis), Lance Lundberg (Wausa) and Dean Steinkuhler (Burr), all of whom became starters.

Steinkuhler, like Kriewald a fullback in high school, won the Outland Trophy and the Lombardi Award and was a consensus All-American in 1983 as an offensive guard.

Kriewald could have gone elsewhere, for track and field as well as for football — he was the all-class gold medal winner in the shot put last spring. Colorado, Notre Dame and Michigan showed interest in him as a football player. But he made an early commitment to Nebraska, and held fast.

"Steve, I think, will fit the mold of some of the great fullbacks we've had here," said Solich.

Joel Makovicka, an eight-man player who walked on, immediately comes to mind.

Kriewald has the potential to be a "great threat as a runner," Solich said. He has "great toughness, great maneuverability from the fullback spot and will certainly be a great blocker."

Zajicek, who will be tried at wide receiver, has good size

and exceptional speed. He has run the 100 meters in 10.47 seconds and the 40-yard dash in an electronically timed 4.35 seconds.

"If you look at his tape, you really become impressed with his athletic ability," Solich said. "He shows very, very well as a running back. But we're going to line him up as a receiver."

He's among 10 members of this year's recruiting class to have attended Nebraska's summer camp, where "we had a chance to see him operate from the receiver spot, catch the ball," said Solich.

Zajicek is a dedicated lifter, with bests of 330 pounds in the bench press, 510 pounds in the squat and 365 pounds in the power clean. "Probably no one has better work habits," Solich said.

He also has been carrying a football to class at Beatrice High to prepare himself for his freshman season at Nebraska, according to Cornhusker graduate assistant Chad Stanley.

That's evidence of the unique commitment to Nebraska of in-state athletes.

Kriewald and Zajicek are no more special than any of the other 19 Cornhusker recruits. But they're also no less special simply because of their small-town backgrounds.

Split end Matt Davison, who will be a senior next season, came from Tecumseh, Neb., as a relatively unheralded member of Nebraska's 1997 recruiting class. Yet he played as a true freshman, one of only six who did that season, and has been the team's leading receiver the past two seasons.

He should move up to second on the career-receptions list before he finishes.

The perceived quality of Davison's recruiting class didn't depend much on him. But it's apparent now that he was an important member of that group, which is why Solich, and Osborne before him, have downplayed what the self-proclaimed experts say on the day after letters of intent are signed.

The national ranking of Nebraska's 2000 recruiting class took a serious hit, no doubt, when quarterback Carlyle Holiday picked Notre Dame over the Cornhuskers and defensive back Adrian Mayes backed out of an oral commitment and signed with Louisiana State.

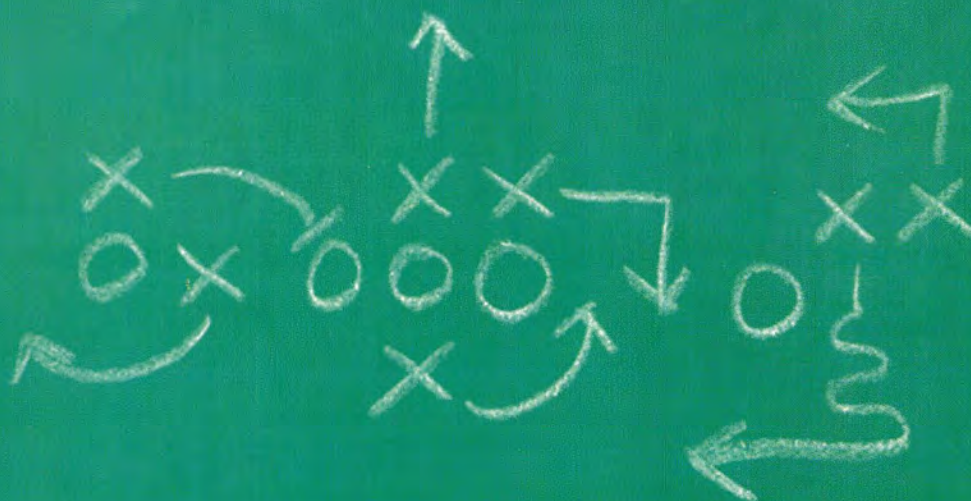
Even so, Nebraska could rank among the nation's best, which would be a rarity.

"We really just go about recruiting in a manner that we don't set out to recruit guys that are necessarily on lists," Solich said. "We just go about it through the film evaluation. It's pretty extensive. It involves a lot of us on the staff. So we feel pretty good about a player once he goes through that system. If he's a highly recruited player, great. If he's not a highly recruited player, it doesn't matter."

"It just so happens that maybe it seems to fit some other people's idea of being a good class." ■



Beatrice (Neb.) recruit Ben Zajicek is a dedicated weightlifter.



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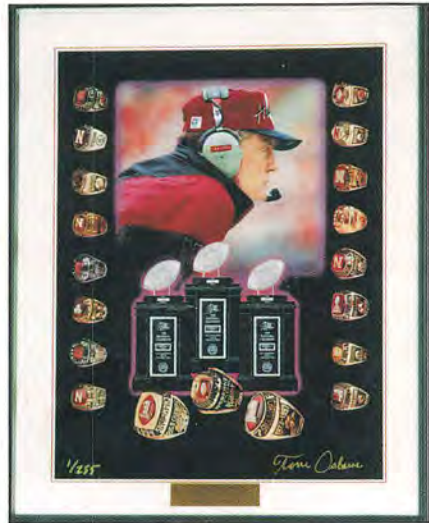


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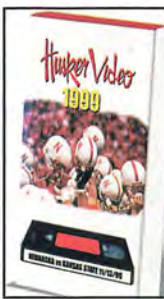
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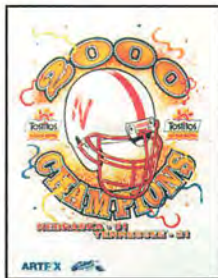


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